Encounter

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27;5

Arnold Wesker
The House

Arthur Schlesinger
Inscrutable History

Mary McCarthy
Ivy Compton-Burnett

Isaiah Berlin
Remembering Namier

John Weightman
Farces

Stephen Spender
Poem

John Wain
Louis MacNeice

A R Zolberg
Frantz Fanon

Philip French
Stammerer as Hero

Frank Kermode
Marvell

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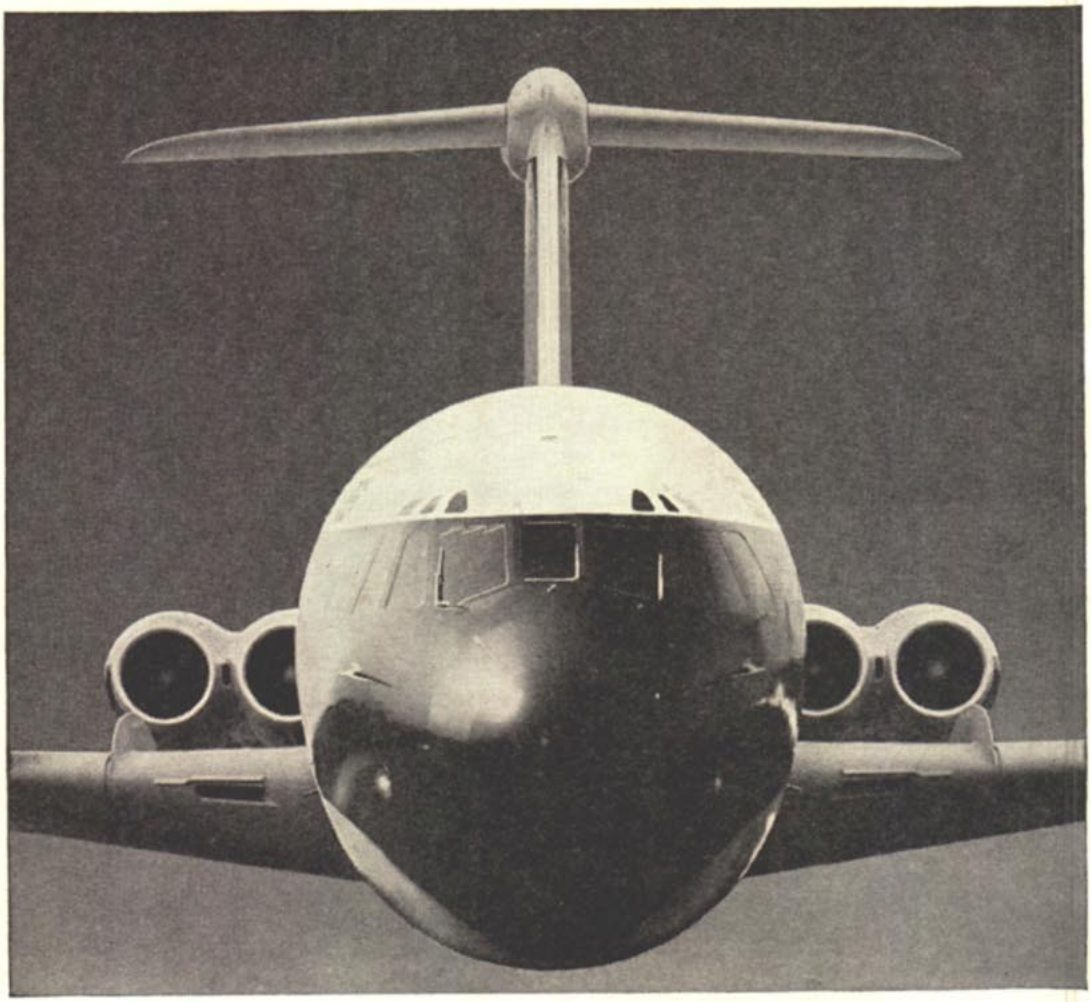

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THE HOUSE	3	*Arnold Wesker*
ON THE INSCRUTABILITY OF HISTORY	10	*Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.*
THE INVENTIONS OF I. COMPTON-BURNETT	19	*Mary McCarthy*
L. B. NAMIER	32	*Isaiah Berlin*
COLUMN	46	*R*
MEN & IDEAS		
A GOSPEL FOR THE DAMNED	56	*Aristide R. Zolberg*
THEATRE		
GRADATIONS IN FARCE	64	*John Weightman*
POETRY		
ISÉ: VOICE FROM A SKULL	18	*Stephen Spender*
PROCESSIONAL	45	*D. J. Enright*
LOUIS MACNEICE AS CRITIC	49	*John Wain*
IN A GROVE AGAIN	63	*Philip Levine*
NOTES & TOPICS		
THE STAMMERER AS HERO	67	*Philip French*
BOOKS & WRITERS		
MARVELL TRANSPROSED	77	*Frank Kermode*
EDITH AND HENRY, PERHAPS	84	*Denis Donoghue*
THE SPY TO END SPIES	88	*John Le Carré*
LETTERS	90	
AUTHORS	96	

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Arnold Wesker

The House

A Lecture in Birmingham

IT IS MY BELIEF that the encouragement of the pursuit of art should be at the heart of all social and educative activity; that, in other words, our cities should be built around our centres of art and not our town halls, and that the arts should have a more important place if not the most important place in the curriculum of our schools. And although part of what follows may indicate why I believe this, I do not propose to make "why" my main purpose. Instead, I shall attempt to argue why such a belief arouses hostility, why that belief becomes tarnished when subjected to hostility and how both hostility and belief end in confusion. It is a paradox that in the nature of the hostility lies the problem of our confusion and that confusion is the very reason why I believe the pursuit of art to be an essential pursuit.

But before we begin let me establish the intellectual temperature at which I think you should receive these remarks. I have not been asked as someone with a specialised knowledge in any academic sense, say as one who has studied a history of art or is erudite on matters of social change, but as an artist, a playwright, and as such you must remember that I am a kind of guinea-pig set in the midst of this confusion who is affected by and is at pains to make some sense of that confusion. This distinction must be made because you will not expect from me, nor can I produce it, the kind of analysis better suited to professors. This is not an apology for inadequacies, but a statement of a division of labour. I am a practitioner not a theoretician, but I'm a confused practitioner and so my only value, for this moment, is to reveal the nature of that confusion. There is, of course, one other reason: as the director of *Centre 42* which is an organisation created to encourage the pursuit of art. In this way you can add to my value as a practitioner who faces confusion, my value as an agitator who faces hostility.

I am always overwhelmed with the difficulty of finding the right questions to pose and the precise arguments to answer those questions. Should I present you with a picture of a man struggling and hope that you will take comfort from the knowledge that you are not alone in your own struggles? It would be an honest picture, possibly even a charming one since the sight of a man full of doubts is attractive and reassuring. And if the task of encouraging a pursuit of art was a minor task among all the tasks that confront men in their efforts to make a better world, then honesty and charm might be enough. But because I believe that involved in the pursuit of art is also a desperate life or death pursuit for an understanding of the complex world we live in; because I believe that the pursuit of art is a pursuit for sanity, self-respect, understanding and reassurance, then I know that charm without faith, honesty without direction are, finally, hollow qualities.

It is one thing to know what one should say and another to know exactly how to say it. And besides, as I've already suggested, these things flow better from the minds of intellectuals, men trained in the art of collecting and arranging their thoughts with all that lovely precision. I can do little of that.

Add to this that you find me at a moment when I am tired of talking and arguing and explaining, and you will understand why this lecture shudders from one slow, hesitating point to another, and why I struggle to find words which have not turned stale. Perhaps this is one

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good reason why artists should never involve themselves in organisations that demand pamphleteering, because they cannot bear to repeat a thought or idea more than once. In fact I'm often tempted to think that art is the one subject you should not talk about—you should just let it happen, or make it happen.

But beyond any question of my own intellectual limitations or an artist's inability to proselytise, is this first question: Why *should* words which were once rich with meaning turn stale like milk turns sour? Perhaps just as milk turns sour in an atmosphere that is not fresh so there is something wrong with the intellectual or moral climate in which these words were uttered. It could be, of course, that the milk was not fresh to begin with, that these words were the wrong words—I'm not sure. But it seems to me that the problem is this: not how to encourage a pursuit of art but how to reaffirm the desirability of the values and experience with which art must deal. The problem is not how can we encourage a man to listen to music because it might shape his sensibilities and hence his humanity, but how do we help a man recognise that his humanity is a quality in him that can be shaped, or how do we explain that it *needs* to be shaped?

Let me put it another way. What words are there left to us to use in our arguments justifying a pursuit of art that are not suspect. How can we talk of the "ennobling or stimulating qualities of art" without being accused of priggishness or censoriousness? Let me remind you of the society in which we live, by quoting from a recently published pamphlet concerned with Policy for Economic Planning, *Patronage of the Arts*:

> A large section of the population is completely indifferent to anything that comes under the general heading of culture and they have every right to stay in this state of non-grace.

Consider these words, for I think their implication goes right to the heart of our problem, and remember, they come from a source that assumes a real concern for the correct spending of money on the arts.

The people are indifferent, the pamphlet says. And they have a right to be. And to prove that they have this right the pamphlet refers to people who do not pursue art as being in "a state of non-grace," thereby suggesting that those who do are in a state of grace. The terms grace and non-grace are used in this sense as terms of derision. The writers therefore seem to feel a need to apologise for their interest; for even bothering to write the pamphlet. They are retreating from the implications of their very own sensibilities. And this coyness, this apologetic attitude, of artists and intellectuals is part of the climate in which we work in Great Britain.

On the other hand, there is in England a mood and a swagger touched by cynicism and disbelief which runs through the younger generation. This disbelief is immediately disarming because it sits on some of the loveliest, alert young faces we have ever seen and it is accompanied by a gaiety which is infectious and enviable. And to encourage this mood is the most powerful machinery of advertising. And because of the gaiety we are seduced into applauding the disbelief, and because the faces are healthy and lovely and alert we are charmed by the loveliness and forget to ask: alert to what? And the music that expresses their freedom has hypnotised their elders who dare not observe, as Thomas Carlyle once observed, "Freedom is a very good horse to ride but to ride somewhere." The society in which we live belongs to the Beatles not to Prokofiev. No matter how much you know that the depths stirred in you by a Prokofiev violin concerto are more profound than those stirred by a Beatle lament yet you cannot say this. You cannot say this because the moment you state your preference you immediately challenge the personality of the person whose preference you do not share. Especially for the younger generation who manifest their taste as a means of telling us what kind of people they are. And dare we say to all those lovely, arrogant young faces that after a while their music bores us, that the thoughts and emotions evoked by the music are shallow?

In a discussion I once had with two of the world's top pop singers one of them compared the value of his music to the value of Shakespeare. What kind of self-confident immodesty is abroad that encourages a pop singer to make such comparisons? And what language do we have with which to confront his claims?

I will admit, frankly, I am awed by the phenomena of Pop. Sometimes even paralysed by it. But what is even more terrifying is the sight of a kind of intellectual capitulation on the part of artists. I am not denying a level of pleasure that pop can give and has given me

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but I am talking about it as a phenomenon that excludes everything else; I am talking about a climate of triviality that excludes everything else because it carries with it a philosophy of indifference, and rejection to any proclamation whether good or bad. As though to proclaim anything was itself a bad thing regardless of what is being proclaimed. It is as though having listened to so much in the past that has led to wars and a general evil the young have decided that it's better to listen to nothing. It is safer to reject everything rather than run the risk of making a mistake. The act of defiance that pop culture carries has become so desperate that it has become an act of cowardice. And how can one explain this to the young when our artists and intellectuals gaily join in like old women desperately pretending their hearts are young and sadly protesting they should not be left behind?

The stampede of the youngsters makes an awful and frightening sound and the artist knows that the pop singer is totally indifferent to his existence and so he is intimidated by this indifference—it is more comforting to join them. And out of this comfort there develops a softening of the critical senses, there develops a kind of impotence that denies us the use of any words which contain a tone of affirmation. In such a climate is it any wonder that our words become stale, that any freshness there may have been in our response to art turns sour?

Consider these two arguments. You all know them; they go something like this:

"What right have you to believe that those things in art which please and excite you should please and excite others?"

And you reply:

"But what else can I believe will please and excite others but those things which please and excite me? I cannot enthuse on anybody else's behalf."

And the argument continues:

"But why enthuse at all? Don't you know that there is something irritating about enthusiasm? Something in the psychological make-up of man makes him erect a barrier against other people's enthusiasm."

And you reply:

"But the face of a man who is moved, stirred, by nothing is the face of a dead man. Would you have me carry the face of a dead man?"

"Oh, no," the argument goes. "There is a marvellous quality to stillness and silence. It is possible to enjoy one's pleasures without rushing immediately to inform the nearest person. In fact, the man who moves silently through life, absorbing his experiences without screaming about them is perhaps a more attractive personality. One would turn to him."

The other argument goes something like this:

"Why do you think the arts in any society are important for all the members of that society?"

And you reply:

"Because I know of no human expression for man by man that equals the truth all great art communicates about the human condition."

And the argument continues:

"But don't you know that there are some truths which are destructive, which cannot be lived with, since not everything about nature or the human personality is attractive or beautiful? And have you the right to oppress people with such truths?"

And you reply:

"But since some truths are beautiful and encouraging it is surely possible to lay two truths side by side and create a whole which, finally, is rewarding."

"Oh, no," the argument goes. "Not everyone is able to cope with these comparisons. For many people the oppressiveness of some truths is more destructive than the beauty of others is encouraging."

There are a thousand such arguments and questions which all of us pose, constantly. And all of them have the power to reduce us to impotence. Why should this be? What has happened to us that we can only ask those questions to which the answers are destructive? What cancer is it this time that has eaten into us so that we no longer produce men who are giants, men who have dignity not arrogance, confidence without smugness, a sense of right that is not self-righteous and a will to act positively while acknowledging man's weakness and failings? Do we ask questions simply because it saves us from making assertions? Is it that democracy, while intending to give people a knowledge of their power to oppose oppression, while encouraging them to question all things, has at the same time given them a freedom which is in fact a kind of anarchy in which they enjoy the novelty of questioning only?

Consider those other words which embarrass us. "Nobility," "faith," "vision," "gentleness." Why is it so difficult for us to possess these

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qualities; and when we meet people who are noble or gentle why do we not believe them and accuse them of affectation? Is it that the possession of these qualities in other people reveals our lack of them and this is an irritant? Is it that we cannot bear to be reminded of the absence of qualities which we secretly value but have surrendered because holding them in this day and age makes us vulnerable to derision? Frightened of the sin of pomposity we say nothing; anxious not to commit wrong deeds we dare no deeds; knowing the mistakes in history we make no history; and because democracy has taught us that all men are entitled to their opinion we retreat from offering our own as though freedom would somehow be abused by our assertions of right or wrong. We are afraid, we have no courage, we are an intimidated generation. In such a climate is it any wonder that our words turn sour?

NOW IF THE QUESTION were: but men are so complex and different one from the other *how* can you expect of art a clarification?—this would be a good question. Because if you ask "how," then this presupposes that an answer is wanted; but too often the question is "why." Why should you want to search since the quest is an impossible one? This is part of the dilemma. If we were working in an atmosphere where the encouragement of the pursuit of art was recognised as a natural process and all argument centred around "how this should be done" then our work would be easy: but in addition to the problems inherent in the process of artistic creativity we are confronted with an attitude that questions the desirability or need for the process at all. Our energy is spent on explaining "why" rather than on discovering the means "how."

Should we evade answering the question "why"? Are we right to spend our energy on finding a new language? Is it necessary to explain why we do what we do? I'm not suggesting as an alternative a superior indifference, nor a haughty attitude which puts us above being called upon for justification of our actions; but I am suggesting that such a justification is impossible given the total indifference that confronts us. It is as though we were walking in the street and someone asked us what right had we to walk when cripples were perfectly happy with crutches and suddenly we were having to justify an action which before had seemed perfectly natural.

I WANT to offer an explanation of why such indifference confronts us, and in so doing shall need to point a finger at a man whose position is so sacrosanct that although we may have entered into discussion with him we have never really challenged his position in our society. And so I will point the finger and do so through a parable, the first story of all time.

Do you know what happened to Adam and Eve when they were kicked out of Eden? Do you know what their real torment was? It was this. They left, you see, a little sheepish for being told off, and a bit irritated with the old man for being so peevish and unreasonable, but not too appalled and fairly willing to face the world outside. And they set about counting the problems. All in all there didn't appear to be too many. They had to eat, it's true, but they were strong and adaptable and they had some sons and they knew about farming so they worked hard and the corn grew and there was food. In fact, it was all much easier than they thought and they were happy and satisfied. So happy in fact that they began to sing and tell stories and scratch animals on the cave walls. And soon they discovered other people and they made friends. There was time for everything until—

One day, Adam decided it was time they had a house. The caves were a bit dreary and in winter they didn't feel much like musical evenings or story-telling or entertaining. So, they went to the nearest builder, agreed on a price, and that's when the nightmare began. The builders laid the first foundations in sand—nothing stood still. The second house they built on an underground stream. That collapsed. In the third house they discovered that the walls were made of the wrong materials and they cracked. On the next house the plumbing went wrong. So they changed to another builder and he and his men also made a mess of the house. They changed builders again—and again and again and again. But with Kafkaesque horror the situation worsened. Not only wasn't the house built but finally the word got round that Adam's family were constantly changing builders; it began to look as though they, Adam and Eve, were being too difficult, too demanding. Each new builder who arrived became more audacious and arrogant than the last and began blaming the family for having chosen the wrong builder before. And Adam and Eve and the kids became intimidated. Perhaps it

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was true, they began thinking; perhaps they *were* to blame; and soon they became so anxious about the house that they forgot all the living they wanted to do in it. Walls were important, and the roof, and the plumbing and the heating system—but it was never completed; something kept going wrong.

The nightmare grew. They began to run short of money to pay, and the builders took over the management of their entire lives. Told them how much they could eat, what they could draw out of the kitty, how many hours they should work, when they could go on holiday—everything. And to this day the house is still not completed. The foreman struts around and calls himself a Prime Minister, and the wages clerk has a large office and calls himself a Chancellor of the Exchequer; and even the tea boy, the one who used to carry messages around the place, he has lots of other little boys working for him and he calls himself a Minister for Foreign Affairs. And you should hear the loud speeches they make in front of thousands of people, or on television about achievement and progress every time they knock a nail in the right way or the plaster doesn't crack.

And all the songs are forgotten and the stories and all that lovely living.

IF OUR WORDS turn sour it is because we have forgotten that the battle is *not* a battle to find a language that will justify either our existence as artists or encouragement of the pursuit of art. It is a political battle, not of one party against another but a battle that the artist must wage with the politician for an equal place in our society. In a parable it may be amusing to equate a persistently incompetent builder with a Prime Minister who makes pompous speeches about progress and achievement each time a new road is built or an age-old pensioner receives an increase of a few shillings a week. But in reality it is incredible that the politician, the civil servant, the bureaucrat should so dominate our lives. Administrators! Whom we pay to ensure that the roads are kept clean, that the kitty is kept full, that we get along with our neighbours—and even those basic jobs they have never done satisfactorily. And if I regard the politician in the narrow sense as an administrator it is not because I have forgotten that real politics have to do with the quality of the life of a society; it is because *he* has forgotten it. It is because he has abdicated the true responsibilities of government. I view him as an administrator simply because this is the view he has of himself. If this were not true then the artist would have been placed in his proper position in society. The almost total indifference to art in our country has resulted in a climate of intellectual and emotional mediocrity which has proved a barrier even to the politician's own pitiful attempts at administration, since it is doubly hard to administer a population rendered insensitive by the absence of the one quality I believe has the true power to humanise—namely, art.

I want to press this point even harder. In England, two hundred years after the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, they have still not organised industry to run efficiently or economically. We seem always to be in the midst of a crisis; years after the production of the popular automobiles our roads are incapable of handling the stream of our traffic—either domestic or commercial. It was in 1880 that the need for an educated working class was finally recognised and primary schooling was made compulsory and in 1891 that it was made free, but look!—three-quarters of a century later we discover, with great surprise, that we have insufficient teachers and lecturers even for those establishments which exist, to say nothing of the shortage of the establishments themselves. I will not go on to give you details of our lack of houses and hospitals; it's all too familiar.

Now—who did the planning? Where were all those "practical politicians" to whom we impractical artists were constantly having to defer? And where are they now? They still make pompous speeches about achievement while the artist is tolerated merely as a decorative hint (and no more) that our society *might* be civilised.

My contention is this: that the politician, having regard only for the manufacturer in our society and caring only for that degree of education that will produce a labouring class fit for those manufacturers, has, even with these ends in view, consistently made a mess of his job. And for this reason the people in this country have not had the opportunity to consider that a preoccupation with anything but the running of a country can be important—hence an indifference to art—there is no more energy left. It is almost unbelievable but the fact is that the politician is the only man whose position in

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society has risen commensurate with his degree of incompetency. And it will prove nothing to point to the social or political reforms of a country; such reforms were the work of the inspired, isolated political reformer who had a touch of the poet in him—since only the poet is capable of a view of man as he could be rather than as he is. On the contrary, had the great social, political thinkers and artists of the past been listened to then we should have been living in a truly miraculous age; but instead we have allowed ourselves to be bullied and intimidated by the politician shrieking about the house! the house! the walls! the plumbing!

Let me quote a passage from the address given about a century ago by the great, still neglected John Ruskin to "the Manufacturers of Bradford":

> You must remember always that your business, as manufacturers, is to form the market, as much as to supply it. If, in short-sightedness and reckless eagerness for wealth, you catch at every humour of the populace as it shapes itself into momentary demand—if, in jealous rivalry with neighbouring States, or with other producers, you try to attract attention by singularities, novelties, and gaudinesses, to make every design and advertisement, and pilfer every idea of a successful neighbour's, that you may insiduously imitate it, or pompously eclipse—no good design will ever be possible to you, or perceived by you. You may, by accident, snatch the market; or, by energy, command it; you may obtain the confidence of the public, and cause ruin of opponent houses; or you may, with equal justice of fortune, be ruined by them. But whatever happens to you, this, at least, is certain, that the whole of your life will have been spent in corrupting public taste and encouraging public extravagance. Every preference you have won by gaudiness must have been based on the purchaser's vanity; every demand you have created by novelty has fostered in the consumer a habit of discontent; and when you retire into inactive life, you may, as a subject of consolation for your declining years reflect that precisely according to the extent of your past operations, your life has been successful in retarding the arts, tarnishing the virtues, and confusing the manners of your country!

The manufacturers of Bradford paid little attention to the words of Ruskin; nor did the politicians of the time value his prophecy sufficiently to *ensure* that the manufacturers of Bradford paid attention to the words of Ruskin. The result is that the arts are retarded, the virtues tarnished, and the manners of our country so confused that the words we use turn sour because they are foreign in any language.

DO YOU DEDUCE from this that I am suggesting the artist should be given the reins of government? Of course not, though I cannot help rubbing my hands with more delight than trepidation at the prospect. What I'm saying is that for us the first task is one of a mental and emotional readjustment whereby we must remind ourselves that the politician is a functionary and administrator, necessary—even essential—but he cannot be the governor of the entire tenor of our lives. For consider the staggering set of problems with which we are confronted. We have the problem of understanding our own complexity, the complexity and contradictions of our needs and responses, and having understood them we must come to terms with them since we are hardly ever satisfied or pleased with what we've understood. Then we have to find the means to understand and come to terms with the complexity and contradictions of our neighbour since we must live with him, depend on him and need love from him, and when those needs are understood we have to discover how they can be satisfied; and lastly, that most monstrous problem of all—how do we cope with what we do not understand or like? In short, the staggering problem is how to be a human being.

And this is the point of the fable: the house is only the first of our needs, but look!—the politician would have us believe that the house is the only problem of importance we must face. The battle, then, is on all fronts. With the politician (and I mean also the trade union leader as a politician), with the artist, the young, the public in general. But the biggest battle is with the politician and trade union leader because in their hands is the power to sanction the encouragement of the pursuit of art. It is humiliating that this is so but it is. The language we must find must be directed at him. We do not need a special language for the general public since the language of art will, given the right climate and period of time, find its own level. But the politician must be ridiculed for his pomposity and humbled from his omnipotence. And so I would say this to him: you are paid by us to administer the land not to measure and shape the quality of our lives. If at the end of the year your balance-sheets are not quite right we will forgive you, we will work harder and help you; but you have no prerogative to portion out the sum we need to spend on art. The artist is the only

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man among us upon whom we can rely for the development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our humanity. *You* have proved yourself unequal to the task of shaping our humanity except in so far as you have "tarnished our virtues and confused our manners."

And to those artists and intellectuals who would accuse us of self-righteousness or priggishness I would say this: why do you imagine when we point to the humanising qualities of great art that we must be implying that our own humanity is complete? Why, when we refer to the crippling effect upon society that indifference to art creates, do you imagine that we are not aware of the cripple within ourselves? There is no logic in this, you only sneer at our enthusiasm as a convenience to hide your own miserable contempt. You would like to appear the guardian of the people's right to pursue whatever they care to pursue in that state of "non-grace." But all you are doing is justifying the bother you do not care to take to ensure that every man enjoys the knowledge you enjoy. In the past men defended material wealth for the few with the same arguments and they were as dishonest when applied to money and property as they are when you now apply them to art. I am saying then that we should not explain and justify—we should demand. We should not beg, we should claim.

BUT I DO NOT WANT to end on a note of high oratory. It is too easy to lead people into any kind of battle. I am aware of so much I have not discussed and somewhere inside me is a little voice nagging and whispering and warning that all the demands we make, all the *Centre 42*s we may build, all the departments or ministries of culture we may create within the framework of a society can only be patchwork if that society remains at heart a capitalist society. So let me abandon, for the moment, the role of agitator and take on the rather curious role of clerk to the prophet—because I want to finish not with my own words but the words of William Morris. And you will recognise the validity of my nagging fears in the truth of his prophecy because what he said three-quarters of a century ago would happen has now happened. You will also find here the inspiration for my parable.

> [In addressing the trade unions at the end of the last century Morris warned:] ... and accordingly the Trade Unionists and their leaders who were once the butt of the most virulent abuse from the whole of the Upper and Middle Classes are now praised and petted by them because they do tacitly or openly acknowledge the necessity for the master's existence; it is felt that they are no longer the enemy; the class struggle in England is entering into a new phase, which may even make the once dreaded Trade Unions allies of capital, since they in their turn form a kind of privileged group among the workmen; in fact they now no longer represent the whole class of workers as working *men* but rather as charged with the office of keeping the human part of the capitalists' machinery in good working order and freeing it from any grit of discontent.... Now that's the blind alley which the Trade Unions have now got into; I say again if they are determined to have masters to manage their affairs, they must expect in turn to pay for that luxury... remembering that the price they pay for their so-called captains of industry is no mere money payment—no mere tribute which once paid leaves them free to do as they please but an authoritative ordering of the whole tenor of their lives, what they shall eat, drink, wear, what houses they shall have, books, or newspapers rather, they shall read, down to the very days on which they shall take their holidays like a drove of cattle driven out from the stable to grass....

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Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

On the Inscrutability of History

MY SUBJECT is the way statesmen use history—or are used by it. As one who is by profession an historian and has been by occasion a government official, I have long been fascinated and perplexed by the interaction between history and public decision: fascinated because, by this process, past history becomes an active partner in the making of new history; perplexed because the role of history in this partnership remains both elusive and tricky.

It is elusive because, if one excludes charismatic politics—the politics of the prophet and the medicine man—one is bound to conclude that all thought which leads to decisions of public policy is in essence historical. Public decision in rational politics necessarily implies a guess about the future derived from the experience of the past. It implies an expectation, or at the very least a hope, that certain actions will produce tomorrow the same sort of results they produced yesterday. This guess about the future may be based on a comprehensive theory of historical change, as with the Marxists; or it may be based on specific analogies drawn from the past; or it may be based on an unstated and intuitive sense of the way things happen. But, whatever it is based on, it involves, explicitly or implicitly, an historical judgment.

And the problem is tricky because, when explicit historical judgments intervene, one immediately encounters a question which is, in the abstract, insoluble: is the history invoked really the source of policies, or is it the source of arguments designed to vindicate policies adopted for antecedent reasons? Moreover, even when history is in some sense the source of policies, the lessons of history are generally so ambiguous that the antecedent reasons often determine the choice between alternative historical interpretations. Thus, in France between the wars Reynaud and Mandel drew one set of conclusions from the First World War, Bonnet and Laval another. Yet one cannot, on the other hand, reduce the function of history in public policy to that of mere rationalisation, for historical models acquire a life of their own. Once a statesman begins to identify the present with the past, he may in time be carried further than he intends by the bewitchment of analogy.

However hard it may be to define with precision the role of history in public policy, it is evident that this role must stand or fall on the success of history as a means of prediction. This is a point, it should immediately be said, on which professional historians, on the whole, have few illusions among themselves. They privately regard history as its own reward; they study it for the intellectual and aesthetic fulfilment they find in the disciplined attempt to reconstruct the past and, perhaps, for the ironic after-taste in the contemplation of man's heroism and folly, but for no more utilitarian reason. They understand better than outsiders that historical training confers no automatic wisdom in the realm of public affairs. Guizot, Bancroft, Macaulay, Thiers, Morley, Bryce, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson: one cannot say that their training as historians deeply influenced their practice as politicians; and the greatest of them—Roosevelt and Wilson—were harmed as politicians by exactly the moralism from which the study of history might have saved them. But then neither was a particularly good historian.[1]

YET HISTORIANS, in spite of their candour within the fellowship, sometimes invoke arguments of a statelier sort in justifying themselves to society: particularly the argument that one

[1] Churchill is a different matter; but he was a politician who turned to history, not an historian who turned to politics. So too was Kennedy.

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should study history because knowledge of yesterday can provide guidance for tomorrow. Thus Raleigh:

> We may gather out of History a policy no less wise than eternal; by the comparison and application of other men's fore-passed miseries with our own errours and ill-deservings.

Or Burke:

> In history, a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind.

In what sense is this true? Why should history help us foresee the future? Because presumably history repeats itself enough to make possible a range of historical generalisation; and because generalisation, sufficiently multiplied and interlaced, can generate insight into the shape of things to come.

Many professional historians—perhaps most—reject the idea that generalisation is the goal of history. We all respond, in Marc Bloch's phrase, to "the thrill of learning singular things." Indeed, it is the commitment to concrete reconstruction as against abstract generalisation—to life as against laws—which distinguishes history from sociology. Yet, on the other hand, as Crane Brinton once put it, "the doctrine of the absolute uniqueness of events in history seems nonsense." Even historians who are sceptical of attempts to discern a final and systematic order in history acknowledge the existence of a variety of uniformities and recurrences. There can be no question that generalisations about the past, defective as they may be, are possible—and that they can strengthen the capacity of statesmen to deal with the future.

SO HISTORIANS have long since identified a life-cycle of revolution which, if properly apprehended, might have spared us misconceptions about the Russian Revolution—first, about its goodwill and, later, when we abandoned belief in its goodwill, about the fixity and permanence of its fanatical purpose—and which, if consulted today, might save us from the notion that the Chinese Revolution will be forever cast in its present mould. Historical generalisations in a number of areas—the processes of economic development, for example, or the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation or the effect of population growth, or the influence of climate or sea power or the frontier, or the circulation of political élites or entrepreneurial innovation—will enlarge the wisdom of the statesman, giving his responses to the crises of the moment perspective, depth, and an instinct for the direction and flow of events. Sometimes this wisdom may even lead to what Bloch called "the paradox of prevision"—to the point when men, sufficiently warned by historical extrapolation of horrid eventualities, may take action to avert them, which means that prevision may be destroyed by prevision.

The result is historical insight: that is, a sense of what is possible and probable in human affairs, derived from a feeling for the continuities and discontinuities of existence. This sense is comparable not to the mathematical equations of the physicist but to the diagnostic judgments of the doctor. It is this form of historical insight which has led in recent years to Bertrand de Jouvenel's *L'Art de la Conjecture* and to the stimulating intellectual exercise involved in the search for *futuribles*. But *futuribles* are speculative constructions of possible long-range futures, useful perhaps to those who may be Presidents and Prime Ministers in 2000, hardly to their predecessors in 1970.

STILL EVERY DAY around the planet great decisions are being made (or at least rationalised) in terms of short-run historical estimates. The whole Marxist world, of course, is sworn to a determinist view of the future, according to which fixed causes produce fixed effects and mankind is moving along a predestined path through predestined stages to a single predestined conclusion. For the Marxists, history has become a "positive model": it prescribes not only for the long but for the short run, not only strategy but tactics—the immediate policies to be favoured, courses pursued, action taken. It is a tribute to the devotion of Marxists, if hardly to their intelligence, that they have remained so indefatigably loyal to their metaphysic in spite of the demonstrated limits of Marxism as a system of prediction.

For, if any thesis was central to the Marxist vision of history, it was that the process of modernisation, of industrialisation, of social and economic development, would infallibly carry every nation from feudalism through capitalism to communism: that the communist society was the inevitable culmination of the development process. Thus Marx contended that, the more developed a country was, the

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more prepared it was for communism, and that communism in consequence must come first to the most industrialised nations. In fact, communism has come only to nations in a relatively early stage of development, like Russia and China, and it has come to such nations precisely as a means to modernisation, not as a consequence of it. Instead of being the climax of the development process, the end of the journey, communism is now revealed as a technique of social discipline which a few countries in early stages of development have adopted in the hope of speeding the pace of modernisation. Instead of the ultimate destination towards which all societies are ineluctably moving, communism now appears an epiphenomenon of the transition from stagnation to development. Modernisation, as it proceeds, evidently carries nations not towards Marx but away from Marx —and this would appear true even of the Soviet Union itself.

HISTORY thus far has refuted the central proposition in Marx's system of prediction. It has also refuted important corollary theses—notably the idea that the free economic order could not possibly last. Far from obeying dogma and perishing of its own inner contradictions, free society in the developed world has rarely displayed more creativity and vitality. It is casting as powerful a spell on the intellectuals and the youth of the communist world as the communist world cast on us during the Depression thirty years ago.

Why did Marx go wrong here? His forecast of the inevitable disintegration of free society was plausibly based on the *laissez-faire* capitalism of the mid-19th century. This devil-take-the-hindmost economic order did very likely contain the seeds of its own destruction—especially in those tendencies, pronounced irreversible by Marx, towards an ever-widening gap between rich and poor (alleged to guarantee the ultimate impoverishment of the masses) and towards an ever-increasing frequency and severity of structural economic crisis (alleged to guarantee the progressive instability of the system). This may indeed be a salient example of the "paradox of prevision"; for the Marxist forecast unquestionably stimulated progressive democrats to begin the reform of classical capitalism through the invention of the affirmative state. "The more we condemn unadulterated Marxian Socialism," Theodore Roosevelt used to say, "the stouter should be our insistence on thoroughgoing social reforms. . . ." The combination of the affirmative state with the extraordinary success of the free economic order as an engine of production—a success which, contrary to *laissez-faire* dogma, government intervention increased rather than hampered—eventually thwarted the Marxist prophecy.

In the end, the Marxists were undone by Marxism. Ideology told them that those who owned the economy *must* own the state, and the state could therefore never act against their desires or interests. Yet fifteen years before the *Communist Manifesto* an American President, Andrew Jackson, had already suggested that the state in a democratic society, far from being the instrument of the possessors, could well become the means by which those whom Jackson called the "humble members of society" might begin to redress the balance of social power against those whom Hamilton had called the "rich and well-born." Thus, in the 20th-century developed world, the economic machine drowned the revolution in consumers' goods, while the affirmative state, with its policies of piece-meal intervention in the economy, brought about both a relative redistribution of wealth (defeating Marx's prediction of the immiseration of the poor) and a relative stabilisation of the economy (defeating Marx's prediction of ever-deepening cyclical crisis). The last place to look for a Marxist victory is precisely the place where Marx said it would come first—*i.e.*, in the most developed countries.

SO THE MARXIST PROPHECY of a single obligatory destiny for mankind has missed in both its parts: in its prediction of the irresistible breakdown of the free economy, and in its prediction of the irresistible triumph of communism as the fulfilment of the development process. In spite of many subsidiary insights and successes, Marxism must surely stand in our time as the spectacular flop of history as prophecy. The failure, indeed, has been so complete that contemporary Marxists revile each other in seeking the true meaning of the most elementary doctrines; the more fanatical stand Marx on his head, rejecting his basic theory and arguing that communism will come "out of the countryside," not the city.

YET THE DEMOCRATIC WORLD is hardly in a position to take too much satisfaction from the intellectual collapse of

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Marxism. It is true that our philosophical heritage—empirical, pragmatic, ironic, pluralistic, competitive—has happily inoculated us against rigid, all-encompassing, absolute systems of historical interpretation. But, though we may reject the view of history as metaphysically set and settled, we seem at times to embrace our own forms of historical fatalism—even if we invoke history less as theology than as analogy. This is only a marginal advantage. The argument by metaphor can generate a certitude almost as mischievous as the argument by determinism.

For democratic policy-makers, history generally appears as a "negative" rather than a "positive" model. It instructs us, not like Marxism, in the things we must do, but in the things we must *not* do—unless we wish to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors. The traumatic experience of World War I thus dominated the diplomacy of World War II, at least as far as the United States was concerned. So the American insistence on the doctrine of "unconditional surrender" in 1943 sprang from the belief that the failure to get unconditional surrender in 1918 had made possible the stab-in-the-back myth and guaranteed the revival of German nationalism. The American obsession with the United Nations came from the conviction that the failure to join the League of Nations had opened the way to the second World War. The American readiness to make concessions to the Soviet Union (as Professor E. R. May has suggested) was based, in part, on an analogy with Clemenceau's France. The American President viewed the Soviet Union as a nation which, having lived in permanent insecurity, could be expected, like France twenty-five years earlier, to value security above almost anything else.

> Roosevelt [Professor May has perceptively written] was determined to see Stalin's point of view as Wilson had not seen Clemenceau's. He was determined that, in so far as possible, the Soviet Union should have the guarantees it wanted and should not be forced into the sullen self-preoccupation of the France of Poincaré.

The second World War, then, provided a new traumatic experience. In the years since, the consciousness of policy-makers has been haunted by the Munich and Yalta analogies—the generalisation, drawn from attempts to accommodate Hitler in 1938, and Stalin in 1945, that appeasement always assures new aggression. Of these analogies, Munich, as the more lucid in its pattern and the more emphatic in its consequence, has been the more powerful; Yalta, indeed, figures rather as a complicated special case. I trust that a graduate student some day will write a doctoral essay on the influence of Munich analogy on the subsequent history of the 20th century. Perhaps in the end he will conclude that the multitude of errors committed in the name of "Munich" may exceed the original error of 1938.

Certainly Munich was a tragic mistake, and its lesson was that the appeasement of a highly wound-up and heavily-armed totalitarian state in the context of a relatively firm and articulated continental equilibrium of power was likely to upset the balance and make further aggression inevitable. But to conclude from this that all attempts to avert war by negotiation must always be "Munichs" goes beyond the evidence. No one understood this better than the greatest contemporary critic of Munich. An historian himself, Winston Churchill well understood the limits of historical analogy. So he defined the issue in his chapter on Munich in *The Gathering Storm*:

> It may be well here to set down some principles of morals and action which may be a guide in the future. No case of this kind can be judged apart from its circumstances. . . .
>
> Those who are prone by temperament and character to seek sharp and clear-cut solutions of difficult and obscure problems, who are ready to fight whenever some challenge comes from a foreign power, have not always been right. On the other hand, those whose inclination is to bow their heads, to seek patiently and faithfully for peaceful compromise, are not always wrong. On the contrary, in the majority of instances, they may be right, not only morally but from a practical standpoint. . . .
>
> How many wars have been precipitated by fire-brands! How many misunderstandings which led to war could have been removed by temporising! How often have countries fought cruel wars and then after a few years of peace found themselves not only friends but allies!

SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER Munich President Eisenhower wrote Churchill, "If . . . Indochina passes into the hands of the Communists, the ultimate effect on our and your global strategy and position . . . could be disastrous. . . . We failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson?" Eisenhower was invoking the Munich analogy to persuade the British to join the Americans

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in backing the French in Indochina. Churchill remained unmoved by Eisenhower's argument. He saw no useful parallel between Hitler, the man on the bicycle who could not stop, a madman commanding vast military force and requiring immediate and visible success, and the ragged bands and limited goals of Ho Chi-Minh. Nor could he see any useful parallel between Europe—a developed continent with well-defined national frontiers, interests, and identities and a highly-organised equilibrium of power—and South-East Asia, an underdeveloped sub-continent filled with fictitious states in vague, chaotic, and unpredictable revolutionary ferment. Churchill rejected Eisenhower's analogy—which did not, of course, prevent Churchill's successor as Prime Minister two years later from seeing Nasser and the Middle East in terms of 1938 and committing his nation to the Suez adventure. This time it was Eisenhower who rejected the Munich analogy.

TODAY the same analogy pursues us again, echoing in the corridors of Washington, with China now cast in the role of Nazi Germany.

"In the 'forties and 'fifties," President Johnson has said, "we took our stand in Europe to protect the freedom of those threatened by aggression. Now the centre of attention has shifted to another part of the world where aggression is on the march. Our stand must be as firm as ever." The instrument of this aggression, we are told, is the communist-instigated war of national liberation. If this technique is permitted to succeed in Viet Nam, it will be tried elsewhere. If it is defeated in Viet Nam, the Chinese will know that we will not let it succeed in other countries and they will have to reconsider their policies.

"If aggression succeeds," Secretary of State Rusk recently said (as quoted by Stewart Alsop),

> it invites larger and more dangerous aggression, possibly leading step by step to world war. That's a lesson we learned, or ought to have learned, thirty years ago. I'm not the village idiot. I know Hitler was an Austrian and Mao is a Chinese. I know all the other differences between this situation and the situation in the 'thirties. But what is common between the two situations is the phenomenon of aggression.

The Secretary of State had even the imagination to compare an exhortation made last year by the Chinese Defence Minister, Marshal Lin Piao, with Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

This is not the place to comment on the Viet Nam riddle—except to suggest that it is not to be solved by bad historical analogies. It may seem a little forced, for example, to equate a civil war in what was up to a dozen years ago the single country of Viet Nam with Hitler's invasion of Austria and Czechoslovakia across well-established national frontiers. And if Mao rather than Ho has now become the equivalent of Hitler, the U.S. State Department has yet to produce evidence that the Viet Cong of South Viet Nam are only the spearhead of a premeditated and co-ordinated conspiracy of Chinese aggression. Nor do the Chinese themselves have the overwhelming military power nor, evidently, the pent-up mania for immediate expansion which would substantiate the Hitler parallel. As for the Lin Piao document, a reasonably careful reading shows that, far from being Mao's *Mein Kampf*, a Chinese master-plan for revolution around the earth, it is a prudent signal to guerrilla movements in other lands, including Viet Nam, that they are on their own and cannot expect direct Chinese support.

The fact that the Munich analogy is invalid does not necessarily invalidate the Viet Nam policy. There is much to be said for the proposition that a negotiated settlement in Viet Nam will be impossible so long as the other side thinks it can win; and this offers a strong argument for a holding action in South Viet Nam, though hardly for widening the war in the north. The point here, however, is not to assess American Viet Nam policy but to illustrate the depressing persistence of the mentality which makes policy through stereotype—through historical generalisation wrenched illegitimately out of the past and imposed mechanically on the future. Santayana's aphorism must be reversed: too often it is those who *can* remember the past who are condemned to repeat it.

"NO CASE OF THIS KIND," Churchill said, "can be judged apart from its circumstances."

I well remember President Kennedy expressing to me after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 his fear that people would conclude from his victory that all we would have to do thereafter in dealing with the Communists was to be tough and they would collapse. The missile crisis, he pointed out, had three distinctive features: it took place in an area where we enjoyed local conventional superiority, where Soviet national security was not directly en-

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gaged, and where the Russians lacked a case which they could convincingly sustain before the world. Things would be different, he said, if the situation were one where the communists had the local superiority, where their national security was directly engaged, and where they could persuade themselves and others they were in the right.

Kennedy, who, like Churchill, had the mind of a first-class historian, was without illusion about the infallibility of historical analogy. The point is not terribly complicated, even for village idiots. Burke long ago warned against the practice of viewing an object "as it stands stripped of every relation, in all the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction. Circumstances (which with some gentlemen pass for nothing) give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect." Even Toynbee, the magician of historical analogy, has remarked that historians are

> never in a position to guarantee that the entities which we are bringing into comparison are properly comparable for the purpose of our investigation. . . . However far we may succeed in going in our search for sets of identical examples on either side, we shall never be able to prove that there is not some non-identical factor that we have overlooked, and this non-identical factor is not the decisive factor that accounts for the different outcomes in different cases of what has looked to us like an identical situation but may not have been this in truth.

Or, as Mark Twain put it, somewhat more vividly, in *Following the Equator*: "We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it—and stop there; lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove lid again—and that is well; but also she will never sit down on a cold one. . . ."

ONE CANNOT DOUBT that the study of history makes people wiser. But it is indispensable to understand the limits of historical analogy. Most useful historical generalisations are statements about massive social and intellectual movements over a considerable period of time. They make large-scale, long-term prediction possible. But they do not justify small-scale, short-term prediction. For short-run prediction is the prediction of detail and, given the complex structure of social events, the difficulty of anticipating the intersection or collision of different events and the irreducible mystery, if not invincible freedom, of individual decision, there are simply too many variables to warrant exact forecasts of the immediate future. History, in short, can answer questions, after a fashion, at long range. It cannot answer questions with confidence or certainty at short range. Alas, policy makers are rarely interested in the long run—"in the long run," as Keynes used to say, "we are all dead"—and the questions they put to history are thus most often the questions which history is least qualified to answer.

Far from offering a short-cut to clairvoyance, history teaches us that the future is full of surprises and outwits all our certitudes. For the study of history issues not in scientific precision nor in moral finality but in irony. If twenty-five years ago, anyone had predicted that before the end of the decade of the 'forties Germany and Japan would be well on the way to becoming close friends and allies of Britain and the United States, he would have been considered mad. If fifteen years ago, as the Russians and Chinese were signing their thirty-year pact of amity and alliance, anyone predicted that by the end of the 'fifties they would be at each other's throats, he too would have been considered mad. The chastening fact is that many of the pivotal events of our age were unforeseen: from the Nazi-Soviet pact and the Tito-Stalin quarrel of years ago to such events in today's newspapers as the anti-communist upsurge in Indonesia and the overthrow of Nkrumah in Ghana (and his resurrection in Guinea).

OCCASIONALLY ONE READS in the U.S. press that leading political figures in Washington are shaping their actions today by calculations with regard to the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972. I am sure that the men mentioned in such stories are themselves under no delusion about the hopelessness of such an undertaking. 1972 is today as far away from us as 1960, and no one reflecting on the unpredictability of the last six years in the United States could sensibly suppose that the next six are going to be any more predictable. I have often thought that a futurist trying to forecast the next three American Presidents in early 1940 would hardly have named as the first President after Franklin D. Roosevelt an obscure back-bench senator from Missouri, anticipating defeat by the governor of his state in the Democratic primaries; as the second, an unknown lieutenant-colonel in the United States Army; and, as the third, a kid

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still at college. Yet that sequence began to unfold in less time than between now and 1972.

THE SALIENT FACT about the historical process, so far as the short run is concerned, is its inscrutability. One must bear this in mind, I believe, when asked to accept drastic decisions now on the basis of someone's speculation as to what the behaviour of Communist China will be a dozen years from now. In its coarsest form, this is the argument that "we must have a showdown with China before it gets the bomb." Here is the old preventive-war thesis we used to hear so often in the late 'forties: yet I do not think anyone can rationally contend that the world would be better off today had we dropped the bomb on Russia twenty years ago. Having been wrong so often in the past, how can we be sure we have achieved such infallibility now that we would risk the future of mankind on a guess?

Who can possibly predict the course the Chinese Revolution will take in the years ahead? The study of revolution has shown us that the emotional and doctrinal pitch of revolutions waxes and wanes; that, while revolutions at first may devour their children, in the end the children sometimes devour the revolutions; that even totalitarian revolutions fail at total mass indoctrination; that a successful revolution begins to develop a stake in the *status quo*; that post-revolutionary generations have their own identities and aspirations; that the possession of a major nuclear arsenal has thus far had a sobering effect on the possessor; that nations follow their historic interests rather more faithfully than they do their ideologies; and that there is no greater error than to try and deduce the policy of future from the rhetoric of the present. Nor does the example of Hitler and *Mein Kampf* change this. Hitler was indeed the man on the bicycle; he had to keep moving. The Nazi revolution never got beyond the first messianic phase; its nature condemned it to *Götterdämmerung*. We must not forget that the Chinese revolutionary régime has already lasted five years longer than the whole life of the Third Reich. And we have seen in the case of the Soviet Union the permutation and erosion time and national interest have worked on what were once thought to be final motives and permanent objectives. With an equation so overflowing with variables, how can anyone forecast now the behaviour of China twenty years from now?

History, in short, does not furnish the statesman with a detailed scenario of particular relationships or policies. Too often it equips his decisions with good rather than real reasons, holding out a mirror in which he fatuously sees his own face. This is not an argument against the knowledge of history: it is an argument against the superficial knowledge of history. The single analogy is never enough to penetrate a process so cunningly compounded not only of necessity but of contingency, fortuity, ignorance, stupidity and chance. The statesman who is surest that he can divine the future most urgently invites his own retribution. "The hardest strokes of heaven," Herbert Butterfield has written, "fall in history upon those who imagine that they can control things in a sovereign manner, playing providence not only for themselves but for the far future—reaching out into the future with the wrong kind of farsightedness, and gambling on a lot of risky calculations in which there must never be a single mistake."

WHAT THEN HAS history to offer the statesman? Let me suggest first that the way to protect the policy-maker from the misuse of history is not to deprive him of historical knowledge altogether. This is the practice customarily adopted in totalitarian states, and the results invariably show the melancholy consequence when politicians believe their own propaganda. Can one infer from this that it is short-sighted for democratic governments, as, for example, in Great Britain, to withhold from its Parliament and people cautionary tales of governmental folly? Happily, we have had in the United States the full benefit of the Bay of Pigs —an event which took place five years after the British adventure in Suez but which has been discharged a good deal earlier from the cosy bondage of official secrecy. Does the British government really regard the protection of the reputation of politicians as the primary function of history? Naturally such a theory has a strong bi-partisan appeal, but it is surely injurious not only to history but to democracy itself. The acquiescence of the British people in the denial to themselves of facts indispensable to the judgment of their masters is one of the masochistic curiosities of our age.

THE ONLY ANTIDOTE to a shallow knowledge of history is a deeper know-

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ledge—the knowledge which produces not dogmatic certitude but diagnostic skill, not clairvoyance but insight. It offers the statesman a sense, at once, of short-run variables and long-run tendencies, and an instinct for the complexity of their intermingling, including the understanding that (as Rousseau once put it), "the ability to foresee that some things cannot be foreseen is a very necessary quality." Indeed, half the wisdom of statecraft, to borrow a phrase from Richard Goodwin, is "to leave as many options open as possible and decide as little as possible.... Since almost all important policy judgments are speculative, you must avoid risking too much on the conviction you are right."

Of course keeping too many options open too long may paralyse the lobe of decision and lose the game. There *does* come a time when accommodation turns into appeasement. This is the other half of the wisdom of statecraft: to accept the chronic lubricity and obscurity of events without yielding, in Lincoln's words, firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right. In deciding when to decide the criterion must be the human consequences—the results for people, not for doctrine.

Randolph Churchill's forthcoming life of his father reproduces an extraordinary letter written seventy years ago by the young Winston Churchill to a New York politician of the time, Bourke Cockran.

> The duty of government [Churchill said] is to be first of all practical. I am for makeshifts and expediency. I would like to make the people who live on this world at the same time as I do better fed and happier generally. If incidentally I benefit posterity—so much the better—but I would not sacrifice my own generation to a principle however high or a truth however great.

Such an approach may seem too modest, even, perhaps, too cynical, for those theological statesmen whose self-righteousness has almost sunk our age. Most of these confident moralists have been high priests of one or another totalitarian faith (though some, alas, have been American Secretaries of State); but all have been prepared in the best conscience and in the name of history to sacrifice their generations on the altars of their own metaphors. It can only be said that, whether they see history as ideology or as analogy, they see it wrong. Far from unveiling the secret of things to come, history bestows a different gift: it makes us—or should make us—understand the extreme difficulty, the intellectual peril, the moral arrogance of supposing that the future will yield itself so easily to us.

"I returned," *Ecclesiastes* reminds us, "and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise nor riches to men of understanding, but time and chance happeneth to them all." The Old Testament carries the case against historical generalisation to the extreme. But, without going so far, we can agree that history should lead statesmen to a profound and humbling sense of human frailty—to a recognition of the fact, so insistently demonstrated by experience and so tragically destructive of our most cherished certitudes, that the possibilities of history are far richer and more various than the human intellect is likely to conceive. This, and the final perception that while the tragedy of history implicates us all in the common plight of humanity, we are never relieved, despite the limits of our knowledge and the darkness of our understanding, from the necessity of meeting our obligations.

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Isé: Voice from a Skull

(remembering Peter Watson)

Here where the Pacific seems a pond,
Winds like pocket knives have carved out sandstone
Islands to shapes of toys: pekinese
Dogs, with bristling ruffs, rampant on mats,
Uprear frilled paws against combed waves;
A pirate sloop shoots cones from conifers—
From its high poop one glistening pine-trunk towers,
Cross-stayed with two dead boughs; —porcupine,
Tortoise, dragon, cormorant.
The boat throbs on
Through sky and sea one solid pearl
Of aching light, in which pearl fishers dive.
It thrusts into long waves that slide
Like rods pushed parallel under silk skeins.
Between those dark lines suns explode.
Oars of fishermen are crochet needles
Plucking up water-threads . . .
I land
Where a path skirts the rocks. A rope
Is slung between two boulders to lasso
At dawn the sun, a loaf for pilgrims.
Following the path, I reach a space enclosed
By cliffs hewn into caves, their entrances embossed
With caligrammic hieroglyphs. Tourists
Snapshoot.
(Japan).
And in a cave
A hermit sits. The tune he grates seems on
One hair outstretched of his white beard.
His bow's his bone-thin arm with skin
The varnished sun.
Against that whine I hear
Suddenly your voice like my own tongue,
The clapper in my skull, ring out
In those gay sneering tones I knew:—
"You were
Once my companion on a journey
The far side of the world, the Alps,
Rock-leaded windows of the snow
And glass of sky and ice and emerald grass.
Blue, white and green were diamonded
Upon my eyes, your seeing.
Now
I am drawn under in a sensual net,
The earthiest of earth
That tangles flesh and eyeballs, with
Their visions glittering still. And you
Lacking my eyes, your living seeing,
Turn like a shadow round the sunlit dial."

Stephen Spender

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Mary McCarthy

The Inventions of I. Compton-Burnett

A COMPTON-BURNETT is a reliable make, as typical of British Isles workmanship as a tweed or Tiptree or an Agatha Christie. The styling does not change greatly from year to year; production is steady. The specifications for the current model (*A God and His Gifts,* 1963) are much the same as those for the original patent (*Pastors and Masters,* 1925). An earlier patent (*Dolores,* 1911) was allowed to lapse. The setting is standard: a large country house, capable of being converted into a school—with visiting days for parents. There are a great many stairs (hard on the help) and passages, suitable for eavesdropping. At the sound of a gong old and young, brothers and sisters, men and wives, masters and servants muster in the dining-room. Other points of assembly are the nursery, the kitchen, and the common room. The period is late Victorian; the subject is human nature, cut from the old block, ribbed in the Adam pattern of murder and incest. Felix Culpa, an androgyne bookworm, is in the schoolroom, curled up with a popular novel, the Book of Job. His sister, Maxima Culpa, is in the library; a sulphurous smell of will-burning proceeds from the grate.

Detection seems to be natural to the English novel; this is true even in Jane Austen, where a Wickham or a Frank Churchill is "found out." The traditional English novel, from Fielding on, deals in lost-and-found identities, concealment and discovery. Unlike the Continental novel (or the American), it is a kind of commodity with a warranty of unfailing reader-interest contained in the plot, which works like a factory mechanism—the mills of the gods. One of the mischievous originalities of Compton-Burnett is to have pursued this insular tendency to the extreme, making it her trademark. She produces Compton-Burnetts, as someone might produce ball bearings. (Dickens produced Dickenses, but Flaubert did not produce Flauberts.) Hence the uniformity of labelling in her titles and the open stock patterns of her incidents and dialogue. The author, like all reliable old firms, is stressing the *sameness* of the formula: senior service. Her books have a magic ingredient—forgettability, which makes them just as good the second time. She has no imitators. The formula is a trade-secret. When she consents to give interviews about her work, Compton-Burnett is cryptic, like an oracle or a hermit inventor.

THIS HABIT OF SECRECY (possibly an effect of the genteel tradition, which frowned on trade and manufacture and still more on their inner workings, felt to be *unmentionable,* like undergarments) has given rise, naturally, to legends about her life and her novels—legends which, in the case of her life, borrow from the plots of her novels, though she herself has complained that life does not have plots. As for her novels, criticism quite commonly turns them into a sort of hearsay or third-hand report, and you can read in the *N.Y. Times Book Review*—or the French review *Critique*—that Compton-Burnett "refrains from"—"often omits"—physical description of her characters, when in fact one of the peculiarities of her work is the stiff, almost arthritic care with which physical appearance is *invariably* rendered: "She was a tall very pale woman of about sixty, who somehow gave the impression of being small and whose spareness of build was without the wiriness supposed to accompany it. She had wavy, grey hair, a long narrow chin . . . ," etc. The insistence on getting a "likeness," as though with the aid of tracing-paper, suggests some naif realist: the Douanier Rousseau or Grandma Moses. The *Critique* authority adds that Compton-Burnett's characters rarely have a profession (doctors, lawyers, authors, clergymen, civil servants, school teachers?) and that she suppresses such "inessential details" as entrances and exits, when actually another peculiarity is her uncannily clear stage directions. The reader always knows, as if by *ESP,* exactly who has entered and left a room.

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An English authority states that she observes a strict unity of place. But the scene shifts from house to house, from house to cottage or church, from a house to a school or schools, and *vice versa*. *A Family and a Fortune* even has a long and somewhat tremolo fugue, when Dudley flees into the snowy night and meets Miss Griffin, another homeless wanderer—an episode that slightly recalls the flight and last illness of old Stepan Trofimovitch, tended by the Gospel Woman, in *The Possessed*. To stage a Compton-Burnett faithfully would require a great many scene-shifters or a revolving stage.

THERE IS SOMETHING in her work that seems to encourage false generalisations about it. She has designed her books as curios, and the fate of a curio is to be ranged on a shelf. Though easy to read, she is a hard writer to grasp. Her books slip away from you, and the inclination, therefore, is to "place" them conveniently. Most criticism of her is replete with lists—of "good" characters and bad ones, flat characters and round ones, "likeable" persons and tyrants; her critics are prone to count, divide, and classify, not always accurately, to measure the ratio of dialogue to description on a page. This counting, these laborious measurements, as of an unknown object—a giant footprint or a flying saucer—denote critical bafflement. Doubtless by her own wish, she remains a phenomenon, an occurrence in the history of letters. It would appear to be hubris to try to guess her riddle.

HER WORK is strewn with big, amateurish-looking clues, like planted evidence to mislead professional pryers in search of meanings, wider applications, influences. She has a fondness for naming her people after the English Poets (no resemblance intended; that is the point), and one of her old women is named Regan—by mistake; her father had thought that Regan was one of Shakespeare's heroines. The English Novelists too, like a private joke, keep nudging each other in these texts, while the anxious reader asks himself what is the point of allusions to Smollett, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Miss Mitford, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Dickens. Is he missing something important? Where is the connection with the story? Many clues lead to Shakespeare (King Lear and his daughters, for instance, in *A Father and His Fate*), and the reader is early put on the scent of Oedipus, the Jane Austen trail having grown cold. The "incest theme," already prominent in *Brothers and Sisters*, reappeared in *Darkness and Day*, as though to confirm suspicion. Did the author, hidden like one of her characters in the folds of her narrative, hope to overhear critics fondly talking about Greek tragedy in Victorian dress and the "stichomythia" of her dialogue?

The incest theme is surely a red herring. The coupling between blood relations (or between people who imagine they are blood relations) is never anything but a twist of the plot. The author is capable of the fullest realism in her treatment of the passions, including the sexual ones, but when she shows incest, it is not a passion but an accident. She is strong on presenting temptation, but we never see a character being *tempted* to commit incest, as we do in the case of murder. Anyone who thinks that incest is the "subject" of Compton-Burnett has failed to see her real interests and the real idiosyncrasy of her mind.

Her books are not like other books; they are, as she might say, books apart. They do not "relate" to their material in the ordinary literary way, but crab-wise. The subject of any given Compton-Burnett is simply a cluster of associations and word-plays, while the plot is usually made up of arithmetical puzzles and brain-twisters.

TAKE *Brothers and Sisters*, which is assumed to be about the "curse of incest," since the principal couple, Sophia Stace and her husband, are revealed to be brother and sister—half-brother and -sister. There are six pairs of brothers and sisters in the novel, one of which is married. And what is interesting to the author is not the "sin" but its mathematical permutations. A child of incest, as one of them remarks thoughtfully, has only one grandfather; this is viewed as a deprivation. The children of Sophia Stace, thanks to her insistence on marrying her own unsuspected half-brother, are underprivileged. Behind the incest is illegitimacy: Sophia's husband is her father's by-blow. This in turn opens up new incestuous combinations at a second remove. Sophia's husband's ancient mother appears in the village with her legitimate children, who become engaged to his children, that is, to their half-niece and -nephew, who are both each other's brothers and sisters and first cousins. What the children of these new unions would be to each other and to their parents and uncles and aunts could best be worked out as a problem in algebra. Relations multiply, as it were cancerously.

And now a new hidden fact emerges: Sophia has cancer. Sophia *is* cancer, the disease at the centre of the novel, which contains three doctors, an unusual supply. Her will is a parasite on her family, like a choking organism. So the subject of the novel is Sophia's will. Her tyrannical will equals power, and power, a malignant disease, equals weakness, since the wilful

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tyrant, who seeks to control the thoughts, acts, and feelings of others, has no control over his own. But the novel began with a will—the other kind, a testament. Sophia's father's will, whose disclosure she fears, is the impediment to her marriage; she sets her will against it, seeing his testament as a tyranny. All testatory wills in Compton-Burnett are in fact puns on the enslaving human will, which is plotting to survive death. A will, however, in the literal sense of a document, requires a death to implement it. There are four deaths in *Brothers and Sisters,* and Sophia, a beautiful woman, is a creeping death, like the shiny mistletoe, fastening on her family. She is afraid of death, and avoids speaking its name, just as she avoids self-knowledge, which would "kill" her. Yet all along, behind her back, her children have been calling her "Sophia"; when she is finally dying and powerless, they do it in her hearing. The naming of Sophia by her children proves to her, on her deathbed, that she is known, after all, brought down to the common level, in a word finalised.

THE CHILD OF INCEST has only one grandfather; in *Pastors and Masters,* a semblance of three manuscripts, where there is actually only one, is produced by theft and lying. The same with the pair of earrings in *Two Worlds and Their Ways,* which go their separate ways, criss-cross, and seem at one point to be three. Duplicity is a moral case of doubling; many or most of Compton-Burnett's characters are two-faced. Coincidence, which plays such a part in these novels, is a sort of incest in the household economy of narrative: a single grandfather (a place or time or person) serves two families of events.

Events, in fact, run in families in Compton-Burnett's novels. The incidents in any given novel have a family resemblance to each other, and this family resemblance, which is often sportive, like the playful behaviour of genes, constitutes the form. The novels are "held together," as a family is, by the accident of their birth—something, by the way, that is never revealed; we do not know the germ, the starting-point, of any of her works. The usual questions put to an author ("Do you begin with an idea or with something you have observed?" etc.) seem as out of place as if one asked God where he got the material for the world. In any case, the member incidents may have nothing in common, really, but a superficial, mocking resemblance, as a grandmother's eyes may crop up, punning, in a granddaughter who is otherwise quite unlike her. Or the likeness may go deeper, into the structure of the novel.

TAKE another example—*Manservant and Maidservant,* the best known of her works. The action opens with a smoking hearth in the dining-room. A jackdaw is lodged in the chimney, blocking the flue. What is the meaning of this? One of the characters is bold enough to ask.

> "Why was it a jackdaw rather than any other bird?" said Emilia, bending her head with her slow smile.

Answer (not supplied in the text): a jackdaw, proverbially, is a loquacious, thieving bird, and we are just making the acquaintance of another loquacious, thieving "bird"—the young footman, George. The jackdaw is also a character in English literature. He figures in the *Ingoldsby Legends,* where he steals the Cardinal's ring and has a curse put on him; reformed, he is canonised under the name of Jim Crow.

George has been brought up in the workhouse, shades of Oliver Twist. His female opposite number, the young maidservant Miriam, has been brought up in an orphanage.

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The nursery upstairs might as well be an orphanage, to judge by the children's condition; ill-fed, cold, ragged scarecrows, they are ashamed to be seen in church among "normal" children. Their miserly father, Horace Lamb (one of the few books the children own is Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*), is too stingy to hire ordinary servants, so that his junior domestics and his children are all of a threadbare piece—charity cases. The cook is a religious fanatic, and the butler, Bullivant, a highly intelligent man whom Horace inherited from his father, is one of those accidents that happen in families; that is, he is a normal being, with no visible defects.

Meanwhile, in the nearby village, a solitary storekeeper, Miss Buchanan, hides her peculiar defect from everyone: she cannot read. This occupational handicap (not to say hazard; she also acts as a letter-drop) is tantamount to blindness. The Lamb children have a tutor whose mother, Mrs. Doubleday, has another form of blindness; because of her egoism, she cannot see what is going on around her: "Mother is blind to the result of following her instincts." Mrs. Doubleday is unaware of her handicap; she considers herself unusually percipient and fancies that she resembles George Eliot, whose portrait, in reproduction, hangs in her parlour, to call attention to the kinship —that George Eliot was a very homely woman has escaped her notice. Similarly, Horace, who is deaf to human misery, shouts at his household, "Are you deaf?" The Eye of God is invoked by Bullivant to make up for a deficiency in his actual knowledge: "There is One who sees."

The novel is also a parable: of the good servant and the bad servant. Possibly a parable of the talents as well; the miserly Horace buries his talent in the ground, like Miss Buchanan, who is hiding her light under a bushel. Or again a parable of the loving father and the unloving father, both characters being presented by Horace, who, like the jackdaw in the legend, undergoes a reform. So the subject is corrigibility: Horace is corrigible; George is incorrigible. This makes Horace (the lost Lamb) the prodigal father.

IT IS EVIDENT that Compton-Burnett builds with a rigid symmetry. Opposites are placed in pairs, as in a lesson. "Mother" is balanced by "Mater," the stepmother. When strict logic is observed, this leads to perspective puzzles, as in *The Present and the Past,* where the children have been taught to call their own mother "Mater," not to make a difference between them and her stepchildren. But when the older children's real mother returns, who is "Mother" and who is "Mater" to whom? Events are marshalled in columns, sometimes in contrasting pairs, sometimes in matching pairs. It is in fact a pitiful procession, like the animals going into the Ark or children being lined up, two by two, in graduated order—double file is always more gloomy than single file. A division according to sex runs down the middle of *Two Worlds and Their Ways*: girls' school, boys' school; girl cheats, boy cheats. But the book can also be divided in two, like the characters' feelings, by another stark principle: home, school. Or a third: old, young. The flat bisection is merciless as a ruler.

Silence & Speech

IN LIEU of toys, amusements, new clothes, Compton-Burnett's children have been furnished with hand-me-down maxims, mottoes, and tags—scraps of wisdom from the family ragbag.

> "The child is father to the man."
> "They also serve who only stand and wait."
> "True generosity is in receiving, not giving."
> "To know all is to forgive all."
> "A poor thing but mine own."
> "The golden mean."
> "Where there's smoke, there's fire."
> "A failure greater than success."
> "No news is good news."
> "There is more faith in honest doubt. . . ."
> "To thine own self be true . . . thou canst not then be false to any man."

Such aphoristic sayings, by dint of hypnotised study, become enigmatic, turn upside down, inside out. When time hangs heavy, there is always that resource. You can shake them, stand them wrongside up, take the stuffing out of them, examine their insides. It is a pastime that does not pall, except occasionally on the reader, and is never outgrown. The adults in Compton-Burnett have got into the habit. They speak automatically in saws and proverbs, which they then begin to query. Polonius' maxim, especially, sticks in their collective mind, coming up in book after book, like a perpetual irritant. In these novels to be true to yourself (if there is such a thing) is—by and large—to be false to everyone else. The characters who are true to themselves prove to be villains, like the young miser Clement in *A Family and a Fortune* or the terrible murdering Anna in *Elders and Betters*. Only a villain would dare to be true to himself.

On examination, many other innocent commonplaces prove to be specious, particularly when they take a paradoxical form—a suspicious sign that a truth has been inverted. *E.g.,* the real fact is that true generosity lies in giving,

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that success is greater than failure, and that no news is bad news. Compton-Burnett's own work often has a paradoxical air, which is the result, however, of her empiricism: her interest in seeing how an idea or a verbal structure would behave if subjected to certain slight changes. Moreover, in the angular geometry of her mind forms imply their complements; a form of words prompts her to find its opposite and its converse, without prejudgment as to the outcome. The reversal of an accepted notion may result in a discovery. "To forgive, it is best to know as little as possible" seems almost self-evident in comparison with the original. On the other hand, a familiar maxim may hold an *unexpected* truth, which is the contrary of its common meaning.

> "It is more blessed to give than to receive." "Ha ha, there is something in that," said Peter. "We have to have things before we can give them."

The maxims and apothegms are those that would be heard in an ordinary household and heard repeatedly. The penury of ideas, like material penury, encourages resourcefulness. In default of new ideas, the old ones have to serve. If sufficient thought is applied, their meanings can be made to multiply and act as queerly as numbers or converging lines. As someone says in *Pastors and Masters* of the plagiarised manuscript, "You wouldn't think one book would have to go so far." And in the same text: "What a lovely family group! An uncle and a nephew and a brother and a sister and an aunt and a husband and wife . . . all in four people!" In short, the old saws, looked into, become deep—fathomless conundrums.

COMPTON-BURNETT'S PEOPLE, including the sympathetic ones, are more often than not sententious, prone to balanced utterance, quotations from Shakespeare and the Bible, which are questioned by the lighter and more rebellious spirits. Bullivant is a polished orator, and great promise is shown by the three-year-old Toby in *The Present and the Past,* when he conducts the mole's funeral service, copying what he has heard in church. To "talk like a book" in Compton-Burnett is not (contrary to what is said by some critics) a proof of inauthenticity. It is a gift.

Quotations and adages are the chief worldly provisions of Compton-Burnett's people and particularly valued by the lower orders, who have fewer of the other kind. It is this that gives her work a grim sadness, as well as monotony: the sense of a ship-wrecked band of hope marooned on a desert island (England or the planet) with Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations.* Her people are survivors, battered, beached floating bottles or time-capsules containing the remnants of human wisdom in aphoristic doses. "It is in the books," says a character in *A God and His Gifts.* "All human life is in them." As though this were not a credit to literature but a melancholy criticism of life.

THE POWER OF SPEECH possessed by Compton-Burnett's servants is an eerie thing. Their voices, coming from near at hand, strike the ear with an effect of surprise, like talking animals in a fairy tale—the frog prince surfacing in the spring, or the horse's head hanging on the wall, or the speaking fish caught by the poor fisherman. Like those talking animals, the voices have the faculty of omniscience, being given to warning and instruction. And the hands and bodies attached to them swiftly execute tasks, as in the fairy tales, beyond the power of ordinary mortals, *i.e.*, the leisured classes. These froggy, fishy attendants wear a menial livery, being bound by an enchantment, and when they remove it, on their day off, they are changed back into human beings.

Something of the kind is true of Compton-Burnett's children. Their treble contributions make you jump, like a sound coming from an improbable quarter. Audibility equals visibility in Compton-Burnett. Children who are not heard are not seen, just as a servant, waiting at table, usually remains invisible until his voice is raised. One by one, the characters at table materialise in a ghostly way, like lights turning on. Until they gave tongue, you did not know they were there; their place on the stage was dark. It is the *unexpectedness* of the voices that creates an effect bordering on the supernatural and reminds the reader of a sentient world all around him, listening, in the shadows. Children and servants are astral bodies.

BY CONTRAST, the family tyrant seldom surprises by his entrance into the conversation. He is already there. His voice is unnaturally loud; Cassius Clare in *The Present and the Past* seems to be equipped with a megaphone or a personal amplifying system. The family tyrant has the floor in perpetuity. Permanently wired for sound, he or she soliloquises, surrounded by a silence. He harangues, accuses, complains. The questions he addresses to his household are mainly rhetorical—they seldom anticipate an answer, at least not the one they get. Or else they *enforce* an answer, with the dreadful command: "Say something! Are you dumb?" Dependants, whose lot is normally to be mute (that is why their slightest whisper has that

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mysterious audibility), when speech is briefly conferred on them are constrained to use it. Enforced speech is the monstrous brother of enforced silence. But since the tyrant cannot carry on a monologue indefinitely, he graciously delegates a small portion of his power of speech to his wife or his old father or some other privileged satellite, sometimes his butler, who are summoned up, out of silence and invisibility, to conduct a dialogue with him. He not only has the exclusive right to speech but the exclusive right to silence. He plays deaf when his wife is talking to him, if that is his mood. The refusal to hear is the supreme assertion of his power over discourse; it reduces the voice of his wife (or other dependant) to a meaningless noise.

In *Pastors and Masters,* there is a mute chorus of schoolboys. The same with the boarder-pupils of the Reverend Oscar Jekyll in *A House and Its Head.* We know they are there because of the speeches directed *at* them. Or a sudden rebuke, as was intended, like a powerful searchlight, brings a boy into view. But the very garments of the female ruler are audible: Agatha Calkin "rustles" as she moves towards her tea-table in *Men and Wives*—a sound suggestive of the movement of a boa.

Speech is magical power in Compton-Burnett. The revenge of the speechless is underhanded by necessity. First, the murmured or muttered answer. "What is that, Tasamin?" "Nothing, Father." "Whispering, whispering, always whispering," complains a female tyrant. "Whispering!" a male tyrant exclaims, as if in agreement. "Whispering and questioning. The two unforgivable things!" Second, mimicry—the frightening gift of Aldom, the butler, in *Two Worlds and Their Ways*; the impersonator steals or borrows a voice that does not belong to him. Third, eavesdropping. Servants and governesses listen at doors; children, who are small, behind sofas. There is even a case of someone eavesdropping on a *soliloquy*. The tyrant himself stoops to listen at doors and then reveals himself, striking terror. Listening, except when the tyrant does it, is another sort of theft—a pilferage of the family's private stores of information. It is tolerated in the butler and governess, because of seniority, and forbidden to the under-servants. After long experience, the family has to admit to itself that the butler, waiting by the sideboard, is not deaf. But an under-servant is forgetting his place if he exercises his normal faculties while he is in service. This is true in the kitchen too, where the cook and the butler alone have licensed access to the Word.

George, the jackdaw footman of *Manservant and Maidservant,* is a cautionary example of the dreadful fate of a servant who does not observe the rule of being deaf and dumb. He starts by answering a question—"Where were you born, George?"—with unseemly readiness, forgetting his place. Next, he is listening at doors. Next, stealing and defying his superiors. It is only a short step then to the primal crime—his master's murder (which, being less than his master, he fails to achieve). But the crime was already present in his wagging tongue.

George's master, Horace, has previously withstood an attempt on his life by his children, who, tongue-tied with him as usual, neglected to warn him that a bridge he planned to cross was unsafe. Their action spoke louder than words. Like George, his children had been wishing him dead; they had murdered him in effigy by melting a wax image of him, which they first stuck with pins, in the nursery grate. In this novel, as in a bad dream, the wish is father to the thought, which in turn is translated for all to read in the indelible speech of action.

Few thoughts remain hidden in Compton-Burnett. They betray their presence—this is the source of her humour. One of the charms of her characters is their transparency. You can follow what they are thinking as plainly as if they said it aloud, which often they dare not do. This is most striking in her hypocrites, who, true to their name, are always stage-performers. An amusing instance is the text for the day announced by Sir Godfrey Haslam (in *Men and Wives*) to his family assembled for morning prayers. "The eleventh chapter of Corinthians, the fourteenth verse." If the reader, pricked by curiosity, looks up chapter and verse (there are *two* Corinthians, a quiet joke within a joke), he finds: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him! But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." Sir Godfrey, in innocent transparence, is preaching against his wife, using the words of the Apostle—she dominates him, and he is ashamed of it.

The unspoken thought comes alive in Compton-Burnett, so that you can almost hear it breathing. Something similar happens with figures of speech—metaphors. Whatever is figurative in these curious books is likely to become literal, as with Sophia's cancer or the blindness of Mrs. Doubleday, who illustrates her situation by being unable to read without spectacles. Even such an idle trope as "I can't put my hand on my glasses," fatefully calls forth a literal answer from the grave of the metaphor: "They are under your hand." "I

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had better put my pride in my pocket," declares Cassius Clare, absently feeling in his pocket. It is not only husbands and wives who return home after being supposed dead (*Parents and Children, A Father and His Fate*); many a dead metaphor is an Enoch Arden come back to life at an inopportune moment.

Words and phrases talk of their own volition. They are not simply the old family servants of those who use them. Take the word *patience,* which (in *Pastors and Masters*) suddenly throws off its disguise and is found to be a "condensed form" of impatience. "Patience contains more impatience than anything else." As though the word had been listening until it could bear it no longer.

The Unique & the Natural

THESE PROCEDURES, strange in the novel, recall logical positivism and modern linguistic philosophy. Throughout her books, Compton-Burnett has been drawing the consequences from the entrails of habitual discourse. Her vocabulary is small—as has been pointed out, not so very much larger than the vocabulary of Basic English. This is not an accident; the same reductive, puritan discipline is at work. She is teaching her vocabulary not to be idle. In the same way, she has boiled down narrative to a few basic plot elements not unlike the statements of symbolic logic. Her books never deal with individual destinies but with binomials "plotted" as if on a graph; that is why her people seem "all alike," although they are not. The logic of language, for her inescapable, works with the key principle of opposition, as stated in such simple pairs as *here, there*; *this, that*; *now, then*; *more, less*. Using these building blocks, what structures can be made? What can be *said* that has meaning? Compton-Burnett's people are striving to wring meaning out of language, where it must be if it is anywhere. Her books sometimes show an irritation with language and its propensity for abstraction, as though it were only *words*. Unlike Joyce, she does not care for nonsense, which to her would be simply non-sense. It is impossible to imagine her *coining* a word. The fewer the better.

Her characters seldom discuss general ideas. That is not in their line. Yet two ideas, which are perhaps only two insistent words, have followed her throughout her work: Nature and Equality.

> "It is natural, is it not?"
> "It is natural that you should remember it."
> "It is the ordinary, natural thing."
> "We cannot alter our natures."

There would be no point in counting how many times—in the thousands—the words *nature* and *natural* appear in her books and in how many different senses. Also how often they are implied without being named. A "natural" child, a child born out of wedlock, is an almost standard plot element; he is the cause of incest, since his parent will not recognise him—a touch of Nature, as the poet said, makes the whole world kin. And yet incest is "unnatural." Parents and children are unnatural in the other sense (unfeeling) and yet when they are most unnatural they are perhaps behaving naturally. "Give me a natural child," says Cassius Clare; he thinks he means an unprecocious one but he is really yearning for a slightly backward child, a "natural" in the old sense. His wife gives the word the sense Rousseau put on it. "It [a child] is a natural thing. That is why it strikes civilised persons as strange." To be "your natural selves" is supposed to be good. Yet human nature is appealed to, in the customary way, to excuse some personal frailty. "It doesn't do to make a tragedy of these things. After all, they are natural." But "these things" are what tragedy is made of. "Human nature writ large" alludes to some sort of baseness; on the other hand, "I think I am a natural sort of man," is said in a tone of complacency. "To be natural is known to be the rarest of all things," but "natural," "ordinary," "average" are often, it would seem, synonymous. "Yes, yes, I am an ordinary man." "They are as natural and ordinary as that." "I am just an ordinary woman, with an ordinary woman's feelings."

SOMETIMES NATURE IS ONLY another name for a sort of rough equality in the human product. She is a factory who has made us all pretty much alike at bottom; our natural impulses are the same. Few Compton-Burnett characters claim to be different from others, though some are. When Sophia Stace does it, the claim at once lowers her: "I sometimes find myself marvelling at the gulf between myself and the average person." Or Mrs. Doubleday, seizing on the word *unique*. "I have heard the word applied to myself. Whether rightly or wrongly, I am not the one to judge." She is blind, of course, to the fact that she is a completely commonplace creature and never more so than in her efforts to distinguish herself. Her quandary is typical of the predicament of the majority: the average person slightly objects to being average or, rather, to being thought so; yet in his heart he is grateful to Nature for having made him as he is. It can happen that an unusual person will pretend to be ordinary, as a disguise in life, and the most evil of Compton-Burnett's creations, Anna Donne, makes a

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point of being a plain, ordinary person, and the awful thing is, it appears in some way to be true.

YET NATURE has another side, which is the reverse of tame and ordinary. She has made everyone unequal, "one of a kind." She is responsible for freaks of Nature, anomalies of every sort, hereditary diseases, and abnormalities. Compton-Burnett's world is teeming with Nature's errors, and those who are most sensible of this are the homosexuals and lesbians, who do not mate in the normal, accepted way and cannot reproduce, at least when they couple in the way that is natural to *them*. In this world of paired opposites, they have no place; they are neither *here* nor *there*. They do not interlock; they are misfits, keys without a keyhole, two left-handed gloves. Not being the marrying kind, they are generally outside the plot, looking in with curiosity and sometimes with envy; what *they* do together can have no outcome but only repeat itself. In a similar position are the companions, tutors, nurses, and governesses, ill-favoured by Nature in one way or another and attached, as solitaries, to the alien body of a family. Those who breed and those who do not constitute separate races. Genteel dependants and the staffs of schools belong to the non-breeders—sad mule teams under a muleteer.

Such deviate figures appear in all the novels, most overtly in the three that deal with schools: *Pastors and Masters, More Women than Men, Two Worlds and Their Ways*. But the question of abnormality is treated with the greatest force in *Elders and Betters*—the most fearsome and sombre of Compton-Burnett's novels. Freakishly, it is the one that most resembles a "normal" novel, in that it meets a theme frontally. The events and characters are bound together in a dreadful unity. There is nothing sportive about their connection. Early in the book, a father and daughter are heard discussing the evolution of life and how lower forms reproduce by "pieces broken off themselves." This Darwinian overture gives the key. "Nature is known to be red in tooth and claw," their relation, the budding murderess, soon remarks, lightly. The theme in fact is the survival of the fittest—in the circumstances a chill mockery of the process of evolution, which here seems to be working backwards towards the lower forms, who are better adapted for the struggle. Everyone in the book is a mutant —abnormal or anomalous.

IT IS A STORY of two related families, living in adjacent country houses, without other social resources—apparently there are no neighbours to call on them—of faintly Jewish appearance, although Jewish blood is not acknowledged by them, and bearing Biblical names. They are a tribe apart. The motherless Donne family have moved into this sparsely populated area to be near their relations, the Calderons. The youngest Donne boy is a cripple; they have a pair of peculiar Lesbian servants, Cook and Ethel; the father has no feeling for his children or indeed for anyone but his sisters; his daughter, Anna, is almost a dwarf, with a head too large for her body, an irregular nose, and an odd, reddish tinge to her hair and eyebrows—the devil's colouring. Quite soon in the book, she expresses a wish for a standard latch that would open all gates and wonders that it has not been invented.

In the other, happier house is a chronic invalid, Aunt Sukey, who has an invalid's self-centredness; she has been a beauty, which also puts her in a class by herself. There is an odd elfish young man, a spinster governess who comes by the day, with her orphan niece, and some original children who have set themselves apart by the practice of a private religion. The boy Julius is heard voicing a heartfelt prayer to his strange god in his Chinese temple in the garden: "Grant that I may grow up into an absolutely normal man."

Having observed his relations, the child is afraid for himself. Nearly everyone in the book is afraid, Aunt Sukey of death, Cook of a shriek in the night; in her unfamiliar bed, the housekeeper, Jenney, screams out in a nightmare; the children implore their god to protect them against the unknown—their cousins. Unlike the other books, this one has an aura, an atmosphere, created from the outset when a long-vacant house is opened. Though the father of the Calderon household is a scientific free-thinker of the type of George Henry Lewes and has given his children Greek and Latin rather than Biblical names, he has not been able to banish the mould of superstition. Unlike the other books too, *Elders and Betters* is devoid of comedy, except of a spectral kind, while a good deal of the wit is simply an expression of animosity.

It is unique in another respect: the children's mother is afraid of doing wrong, the sole instance of this in the canon. Jessica Calderon is a completely unselfish person—the greatest anomaly of all.

Scrupulous, imaginative, good and perpetually guilt-ridden, she is a born human sacrifice. By a monstrous reversal, she is driven to kill herself by her dwarfish niece, Anna, who persuades her that she is evil. The goodness of Jessica, which culminates in an almost supernatural penetration, is received by Anna with cowering fear, and this fear is not simulated;

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to Anna, goodness inevitably appears as evil since it is the opposite of herself.

To herself, Anna is fighting for survival, as though literally for her life, in a power-struggle involving her aunt Sukey's will. It is either her or her aunt Jessica; there is not room for both. She cannot imagine co-existence (as well as between the sun and the moon!) and naturally she sees herself as a daylight, open person and her aunt as a dark force. Anna's will is stronger than Jessica's, for Jessica only wants to know the truth—something her niece cannot even understand.

But Jessica has already been marked for elimination, on the day there were thirteen at the luncheon table (or so it was thought, by a miscount). According to the superstition, the last to sit down in a party of thirteen is slated for death. Jessica watches her two families—brothers and sisters, parents and children—all jockeying not to be last, and is found quietly standing when the rest have taken their seats. Then she sits down. Her willingness to be an odd number (the oddest of all numbers, prime and one over a dozen) disqualifies her as *unequal* to the struggle.

THE IDEA OF EQUALITY—or inequality—is bound up with the idea of Nature, which seems to pronounce on both sides of the question. Originally social inequality was regarded as natural; this faith, however, has been shaken by the time of the novels, though no one in them knows exactly when or how.

"I wonder who began this treating of people as fellow-creatures," says a character in *Manservant and Maidservant*. "It is never a success."

"Once begun, it is a difficult thing to give up," another character answers.

"It seemed such an original idea," a third says, as if with a sigh.

"We can see how unnatural it is by what comes of it," the first retorts.

But, once introduced, the idea of equality does appear natural, not only as a "self-evident" proposition in political philosophy but by the very fact of having entered a number of minds. At the same time, social equality does not seem to square with the facts of life, some of which are the facts of Nature as well.

The discussion in *Manservant and Maidservant* has been provoked by George, the footman, who has just left the room. The equality with his master so ardently, even criminally desired by George is not a natural thing, and yet everyone, starting with George, feels that his desire for it is natural. For if it is not natural, where did it come from? He was not taught it in the workhouse; nor did he derive it from reading. George does not "know his place" and cannot be taught it by Bullivant, the butler, by Mrs. Selden, the cook, nor by bitter experience. The one thing George has learned in life is to know better than to "know his place." It does not advance him to know this; it does not make him a better footman, certainly—nor a better human being than Bullivant, who has found his place by knowing it. It just makes him different. A problem. The natural man in George is a criminal, in the same way that the natural child cropping up in Horace's offspring is a parricide. It is Horace's fault, of course, that his children wish to kill him, but it is not Horace's fault, really, that George grew up in the workhouse. Nor George's. It is Society's fault, but perhaps not altogether in the last analysis, since Society did not make him illegitimate; his parents did. George is a Jim Crow. A natural thing, like the jackdaw in the chimney (or the dead mouse brought in by Plautus, the cat, in *Mother and Son*), spreads consternation in civilised society, which does not know what to do with it—it is there but it does not "belong."

The question of equality is seen from another angle in the kitchen. "We cannot choose our walk in life," says Bullivant dryly, "and there would be many fewer if we could." The cook draws a different moral, excusing Miriam, the maidservant, for her unwillingness to share things. "It is the orphanage routine. Things would be communal beyond the natural point." The cook does not specify where the natural point would be. That is the mystery.

THE OMNIPRESENCE of servants in Compton-Burnett is a chronic reminder, like a cough, of the fact of inequality. Their function in the books is to testify that they are *there*. Like witnesses in the box in a murder trial, they bask in the unaccustomed limelight—they are having their day in court. One thing they will never do is to pretend to relish their employment. They are not just commentators but living comments. Being in service has not always brought out the best in them. Below stairs, in the nether regions of the servants' hall, there is a ceremonious class society presided over by the infernal butler and his queen and ally, the cook, who are at liberty there, when not summoned by a bell, to devil their subordinates and conduct an antiphonal dialogue, sonorous like prayers and responses, over their subordinates' heads. It is some compensation for being a servant that there are others still lower on the scale. But not enough—something the cynical George sees clearly and that explains his lack of incentive to better him-

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self in his calling. A servant is a servant, as he reminds Bullivant.

The servants below stairs and the children above stairs are the weak in the social structure, which in the case of children is also the natural structure. It is natural that children should be weaker than their parents, and it seems to be natural too (at least it is taken for granted) that those who have the shortest legs should have the most stairs to climb. Like the servants, the children are the first to feel the pinch of economy. Saving begins above and below stairs, where it does not show. No one questions the principle that children and servants should have inferior food, just as no one questions the principle that food in boarding-schools should be wretched. Decent food, apparently, does not need to be "wasted" on people who are naturally hungry. The principle obtains in the kitchen too where the younger servants, who work the hardest, receive the scantiest rations.

The concern with "place"—*i.e.,* where you belong, as though it were a physical space—seems to require that no one should put himself in anyone else's, even in imagination. It is too risky. Except among children and the women who take care of them, fellow-feeling is extremely rare in Compton-Burnett's characters. Those who show it are generally those who have no place of their own. It is an unusual mother, for instance, who shows imaginative sympathy with her children.

A repeated humiliation the children undergo is to be made to wear old, out-of-fashion, pieced-out clothes for festive occasions. The "best dress" of a Compton-Burnett schoolgirl (like that of her schoolmistress), instead of being a covering, is a sort of nightmare nakedness—a public exposure of lack of means. Clothes are important in Compton-Burnett, though their exact cut and material (except Miss Munday's satin in *More Women than Men*) is left to the reader's horror-struck imagination. Far from being appearance, they are brute reality. You can lie, as a school pupil in uniform, about your home circumstances, but your best dress, when you are forced to put it on, tells the true story.

DEATH IS A GREAT TEST for the wardrobe. It is a proud moment when Mrs. Selden in reply to Bullivant's question ("And have you mourning of a suitable character happening to lie by you?") is able to announce: "I am in a position to appear in black from head to foot." The trappings of woe are a grandiose proclamation, not only of financial status but of moral superiority. Mourning, like a bridal veil, dignifies the wearer and constitutes a sort of promotion.

More Women than Men (which contains two practising homosexuals and three practising lesbians) is packed with clothes, mostly old. The only new ones are bought by the principals at weddings and funerals. The awful headmistress, Josephine, cannot resist a roguish allusion to "my sable form" when she appears among her teachers in the common room, conscious that her subordinates are still further humbled by the visible signs of her loss. Her husband, subtracted from her, has become an addition to her womanly charms. Her middle-aged coyness ("my experienced phiz," "[my] mature form," "my sable array") puts a bold front on what would normally be liabilities. Her wretched teachers are *betrayed* by their clothes, but Josephine is a successful liar, and her sable array is the best kind of lie—one that does not resort to verbalisation.

HER GRIEF FOR HER lost consort is a pure parade. But in fact no one really feels death as he should. The one who is capable of doing so is, unfortunately, at that moment beyond feeling, *i.e.,* the deceased. We can never be quite as sorry for the death of someone else as we would be for our own—this proposition is bedrock in Compton-Burnett's thought. The dead man's tragedy is that he is not there to mourn himself, since no one else can do it as well for him. And yet, as long as he is alive, a man cannot feel his own approaching death as real or probable. Indeed, the nearer it approaches, the more he disbelieves. So he is unable to mourn his own loss in advance, attractive as the idea seems.

Nature, our unnatural mother, has arranged that we shall all die. But to any one man, his death is an unthinkable injustice, something that should not be done to *him.* That no one can share his feeling—at least with the same bitterness and sense of outrage—seems to prove that injustice is universally condoned. Proverbially, death makes us all equal, but we could not appreciate the equity of this unless we were all to die at the same time. That, however, would leave no mourners—another unthinkable thought. Between the living and the dead, there is a gross inequality, even though the dead, like the poor, are believed not to feel it. There is a "gulf." Death and life are a mismatched pair, the extreme example of incompatible opposites.

It is revealing that Anna (a blunt instrument) in *Elders and Betters* is able to speak of death as if it were an ordinary, everyday occurrence, which of course it is. She asks how her mother died, and when her father tells her that it was a chill that went to the lungs: " 'Well,

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what could be more ordinary than that?' said his daughter, rising and hastening to the door on some other concern." Looking back, the reader can see that this should have readied him for a murder. In the same book, the *abnormality* of death (for that is how it appears to a normal person) is keenly felt by the invalid Aunt Sukey, who has been given a short time to live. She cannot help noticing that no one in her family seems to want to know this. And it is true that they are embarrassed to admit that she may be dying, *i.e.*, that she is different.

In the opening scene of *The Present and the Past*, the children are playing near the hen-coop. One hen is sick, and the others have begun to peck it—the One and the Many, the strong and the weak. The hen dies, but Toby, the three-year-old, does not understand finality. "Poor hen fall down. But soon be well again." "Hens don't mind dying," lies the nursery-governess. "They die too easily." The children are not totally convinced. "It was pecked when it was dying," one of the older boys objects. "They always do that, sir," says William, the gardener, with an air of offering comfort.

ALL COMPTON-BURNETT'S books are concerned with Nature, Equality, and Death. That is what they are "about." Nature is brought to the fore in *The Present and the Past*. In the ordinary sense of plants and animals. It is the only book where a gardener is found in the cast of characters; off-stage, towards the end, there is a village flower-show. Toby is strongly attached to William, who drinks beer. On the afternoon of the hen's death, William, whom Toby is "helping," finds a dead mole. "Well, everything dies in the end, miss," he says to Toby's sister, Megan. "It will happen to us all." Being close to Nature, he is on easy terms with death. Megan's face clears "at the thought of this common fate." Because she is young, with a child's fair-mindedness, equality makes it "all right."

Equality does not make it all right with the children's father, Cassius. He aims to be superior to the mole. A self-pitying man, he hankers to commit suicide in order to be the centre of attention and to make his family sorry they have not loved him more. What deters him is that he would not be there to witness the general grief. Cassius' dilemma is a ridiculous *précis* of the dilemma of anyone confronting his own extinction. Cassius proposes to eat his cake and have it. By simulating suicide, he provides for his own death and resurrection. It works, but there is a sequel. His family discovers the trick. Shortly afterwards, he has a heart attack and goes into a coma; his butler, feeling that he is shamming again, does not call a doctor. Cassius dies, and everyone *is* sorry, but he is not there to see it.

Among Cassius' other errors is the fatal notion that he can have two wives at once, his ex-wife and his present one. He also errs in treating his butler as a second self, which gives the butler, who is a humbug like Cassius, the false idea that he is a sort of junior brother to his master. This is a contributory cause of Cassius' death, since Ainger, his vanity swollen by Cassius' confidences, takes it on himself to decide whether a doctor should be called: Cassius' wife is absent, and his old father yields to the butler's judgment that Cassius should be taught a lesson. His suicide was meant to be a lesson to his family (like Hetta Ponsonby's disappearing act in *Daughters and Sons*), the motto being that if you try to teach a lesson, you may learn one. In a sense, after all, Cassius dies by his own hand; his false suicide contained a real death inside it, like a loaded cartridge, and his sole achievement is to manage to kill himself while being too cowardly to take his own life.

Life & Literature

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT are evidently opposites—in language mutually exclusive, in life not always. Unlike a dead person, the past *can* rise again and mortify the present—which may simply prove, though, that "past" was a misnomer. The present can try to bury the past, an operation that is most atrocious when it is most successful. The substitution of a step-mother for a dead mother is an odious instance. It leads the stunned children to ask whether a dead person can be *replaced*—a shocking question to an innocent mind. Adults evade it. To the children, their real mother is both absent and present, present in the shape of a blank, where her place was. Missing someone in Compton-Burnett is always conceived spatially. When the space is filled by a new wife, is it the same space or is it altered by what fills it? If it is altered, what happens to the original space? Where is it?

There is no room for the dead in practical life or for the past either. That is why people try to suppress it. Yet the past, even when it consents to die, has a feeble sort of immortality owing to its persistence in memory, just as the idea of equality cannot be laid to rest once it has been thought of. This defective and inadequate immortality is a property of mind. It is attached most vigorously, by common consent, to works of art. Hence the books and authors in Compton-Burnett.

She is wryly, uncomfortably aware of belonging to a long-lived species, the family of

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authors, whom she looks on with that mixture of tolerance, dislike, hilarity, affection, embarrassment that makes up family feeling. Here, surely, is the reason the names of authors are fastened, so inappropriately, almost unkindly, on her characters (Dr. Chaucer and his niece, Miss Bunyan), as children are named for great-aunts and grandparents without being given any choice in the matter. She is not especially proud of her family tree; many of the old writers were not nice people, and they all profited from the advantage they had over ordinary men and women. Ordinary men and women "live on" in their descendants—a biological fancy that is not especially consoling. But authors have a double life and, in principle, a double chance of survival, through their brain-children, who will certainly outlive them (that is the vexing part) and may attain a fabulous age.

The poetical extracts sprinkled through her work are testimonials to this longevity. In *Darkness and Day,* the servants are ruminating in the servants' hall. " 'To thine own self be true.' " "Who said the words?" a voice demands, and another voice issues, as if from a cave: "Deep things become dispersed." In other words, the corpus of Shakespeare has been acting like a corpse—slowly decomposing and enriching the humus. His name may be lost, but the ashes of his work have been scattered abroad. Or, having rained down, he has been returned to Heaven in the form of a cloud, whence he redescends, repeating the process *ad infinitum*.

BEING AN IMMORTAL, the author is manifestly a god, just as God is an immortal fictional character (perhaps Compton-Burnett's favourite villain) described in the Good Book. Such an author, Hereward Egerton, is the epic hero of her latest novel, *A God and His Gifts*. He is named after Hereward the Wake—an allusion to Charles Kingsley's novel and to an early literary forgery. The "creative" writer has figured in a minor way in many of the novels, but he has usually been a failed writer or a failing one, like John Ponsonby in *Daughters and Sons*. Here he expands into a cosmic joke, filling the whole sky.

Hereward Egerton, a popular novelist, is a household word. His fertile imagination has brought happiness to the multitude. He breeds best-sellers and the other kind of progeny, as is fitting for a "genius," begetting them on his wife, his wife's sister, his son's fiancée. He is "at work" on the fiancée of a second son when his course is finally arrested. The names of the fiancées are italicised in the text, like titles. " 'Her name is *Beatrice,* and she is called *Trissie*." His amorous history somewhat recalls Dickens'; Dickens had a popular magazine which he called *Household Words*.

Owing to his copious royalties, Hereward descends in a shower of gold on the Danaes of his household. The mystery of capital, which has the power of breeding when invested, is much discussed by his old parents, whom he supports. Hereward is the family capital, the goose that lays the golden eggs; he is a talented fool, who, his father feels, is practising a womanish profession that unaccountably *pays*. Like capital, Hereward's tendency is monopolistic. As he says to his son, Merton, who is trying to be a "serious" writer: "One writer in a house is enough."

One breeder in a house would be enough too, if Hereward were left to follow his natural inclinations. Like all full-grown males still at the breeding age in Compton-Burnett, he resents having younger full-grown males under his roof. By his own unaided efforts, his family is multiplying. His Jovian relation with his sister stops just short of incest; he has found a better use for her, as the partner of his toil.

Power over the word, which Hereward enjoys *ex cathedra* as head of the family, has been extended to power over words, which makes him "a law unto himself," the usual claim of authors. Vicariously, through his books, he has entered thousands of homes. It is this that gives him licensed access to all the females in his family. He feels himself as all-pervasive, like light. The young women he impregnates are his public—admiring readers, in short, push-overs. When he was young, he wrote for the few (and had a single, unproductive mistress), but now, in his maturity, he writes for the many. Godlike, he expects gratitude for the gifts he brings, the "seed" he has sown. He does not get enough to suit him. Like most domestic tyrants in Compton-Burnett, he has a sense of martyrdom—which he shares, of course, with the Christian God, who made himself the archetypal Martyr. No human return could be adequate to Hereward's thirst for appreciation.

Hereward's promiscuity has its literary side. The chief fault of the creative species is its indebtedness to life. Hereward is no exception; he borrows his material from the life around him—even, it is indicated, from the characters and events of his most intimate experience. As always, this indiscriminate practice is frowned on by those he "uses." From Hereward's point of view, his little loans are amply repaid by the debt society owes him as a creator. The relation between life and literature—the final antinomy—is one of mutual plagiarism.

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IN THIS FINAL VOLUME, the literary theme, like a wonderful sponge, has absorbed all the others: Death, Incest, Illegitimacy, Nature, Inequality. The literary theme was present at the outset in the multiplying manuscript of *Pastors and Masters*, which turned out to be an exhumed piece of juvenilia and a miserable plagiarised copy. The obvious reason for plagiarism is a desire to shine plus a deficiency of talent. There is not enough talent to go around, though everybody secretly feels he could be a writer if he tried. Or that his life, "written up," would make a book. A natural wish has met with an unjust distribution of goods. The result, as in George's case, is crime.

Plagiarism—petty literary theft—is a crime peculiar to the educated classes; a number of Compton-Burnett's characters yield to its temptation: the don and the schoolmaster in *Pastors and Masters* (one of whom is stealing from himself); the children who copy in *Two Worlds and Their Ways*; Megan, in *The Present and the Past,* who copies a poem for the mole's epitaph and offers it as her own; Dominic Spong, who copies his own grief-stricken letter announcing his widowerhood and sends it to all his female correspondents. Plagiarism in reverse, as befits the bottom of the heap, is practised by the uneducated young nursemaid Mullet (*Parents and Children*), who tells the children nightly "chapters" from her life-story —a made-up tale transparently "inspired" by cheap literature. In Mullet's case, the deficiency is not in talent but in the *un*inspired poverty of her real history, which drives her to invent. A respectable kind of plagiarism is the scholarly biography, described by Charity Marcon (*Daughters and Sons*), herself a biographer, as made in the British Museum from material lifted from other books and mixed together. "Books are very like plants . . . they come up out of each other and are all the same." Hereward is too "big" for these minor forms of plagiarism; he lifts his material wholesale directly from life and even though detected is compensated by royalties.

One of the excuses Hereward gives himself for his domestic misconduct is the excuse of social utility: he has lived to "serve" the many. He also sees himself as an "instrument," a sort of Aeolian harp. The idea of social service combined with large profits is a typical capitalist notion; Hereward regards his "investment" of himself in his work as a meritorious act which rightly pays dividends—exactly the attitude of the "creative" businessman, which is what Hereward really is.

It is said (sometimes as a compliment) that Compton-Burnett has no interest in social problems. The world she has made, because there are no factories or slums in it, is mistaken for Jane Austen's "little bit of ivory." But the poor in Compton-Burnett are, precisely, made conspicuous by their absence ("What's missing in this picture?")—to be inferred by the reader, if he is paying the slightest attention, from the horrible scarves, shirts, and petticoats charitably knitted and sewn for them by the idle classes. The toiling, spinning masses are invisible and unheard, like the silent chorus of schoolboys whose marmalade is being watered. Remarks are made *about* them, and the worst are the "feeling" ones: "We should remember the less fortunate people when we are in want of nothing ourselves." Compton-Burnett has as much belief in philanthropy as Karl Marx himself. Whatever her voting habits, in her writing she is a strict economic realist with no partiality for the well-to-do. Her writing is extraordinary in its lack of social snobbery. Here she is far ahead of Jane Austen and of most of her own contemporaries. She does not even have an interest in social climbers, a sure sign of secret snobbery in an artist. That is probably why her books, despite the swarms of servants in them, have not found a larger public. They evoke "a vanished world" of privilege too unsparingly. Nor can a liberal reader flatter himself that the disappearance of a servant class has lent these novels a "documentary" interest; conditions have changed, but the condition has not.

WHAT FLASHES OUT OF HER WORK is a spirited, unpardoning sense of injustice, which becomes even sharper in her later books. In her own eccentric way, Compton-Burnett is a radical thinker, one of the rare modern heretics. It is the eccentricity that has diverted attention from the fact that these small uniform volumes are subversive packets. If their contents had to be reduced still further, boiled down to a single word capable of yielding a diversity of meanings, the word might be *necessity*. From strict to dire. From "constraint or compulsion having its basis in the natural constitution of things" to "the condition of being in difficulties or straits, esp. through lack of means; want; poverty." Not omitting its uses in phrases and proverbs, nor "a bond or tie *between* persons, *Obs. rare*." It is a deep word, like her works.

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Isaiah Berlin

L. B. Namier

A Personal Impression

THIS account of Sir Lewis Namier is based upon no research and is composed purely from memory. Namier was one of the most distinguished historians of our time, a man of fame and influence. His achievement as an historian, still more his decisive influence on English historical research and writing, as well as his extraordinary life, deserve full and detailed study. For this task I am not qualified. My sole purpose is to describe to the best of my ability the character and some of the opinions of one of the most remarkable men that I have ever known. I was not at any time one of his intimate friends; but his immediate intellectual and moral impact was such that even those who, like myself, met him infrequently but regularly, and spoke with him, or rather were addressed by him, on matters in which he was interested, are unlikely to forget it. It is this impression that I should like to record for the benefit of those who did not know him and may be curious about the kind of man that he was.

I first came across his name as an undergraduate at Oxford, in, I think, 1929. Someone showed me an article by him, in either the *New Statesman* or the *Nation*, on the condition of the Jews of modern Europe. It was the best and most arresting piece on that subject that I or, I suspect, anyone had ever read. Much was being written on that topic then. For the most part it was competent journalism: a combination of intellectual power, historical sweep and capacity for writing clear and vigorous prose was seldom, if ever, to be found among the writers on this subject, whether Jews or Christians. This essay was of an altogether higher quality. In reading it one had the sensation—for which there is no substitute—of suddenly sailing in first-class waters.

Namier compared the Jews of Eastern Europe to an iceberg, part of which remained submerged and still frozen; part of which had evaporated under the influence of the rays of the Enlightenment; while the rest had melted and formed violent nationalist or socialist-nationalist torrents. He developed this thesis with incomparable imagination and a power of incisive historical generalisation that was at once factually concrete and had great historical sweep, with no attempt to play down disturbing implications. I wondered who the author might be. I was told that he was an historian whose work had caused some stir in the world of learning, at most a respected specialist, but not a scholar of the same order as Tout or Barker or Fisher, not to speak of Halévy or Trevelyan. That was that: the author was a minor historical expert with a fairly high reputation in his own profession. I heard no more until 1932 when I was elected to All Souls.

THERE I FOUND that a higher opinion of Namier was entertained by my new historical colleagues —G. N. Clark, Richard Pares, A. L. Rowse and others. From them I learnt something of Namier's real achievement. My election to All Souls had evidently intrigued Namier, who had failed to secure election himself some years before the First World War.[1] I received a note in which, in huge majuscule letters, the author informed me that he proposed to call on me one afternoon in the following week and hoped that I would be free to receive him. The letter was signed L. B. Namier.

When he arrived, he said in his slow, deliberate, ponderous voice, that he wished to see me because his friend Richard Pares had told him that I was interested in Karl Marx, of whom he held a low opinion. He wished to know why I was engaged in writing a book about him. He had some respect for the Fellows of All Souls. He believed them, for the most part, with certain exceptions which he did not wish to mention, to be intellectually quali-

[1] "I have always had a certain grudge against Grant Robertson, who, as examiner, had preferred Cruttwell to myself," Namier said to me in the late 'thirties, "but when I think of what he has done for the German Jewish refugees—I forgive him."

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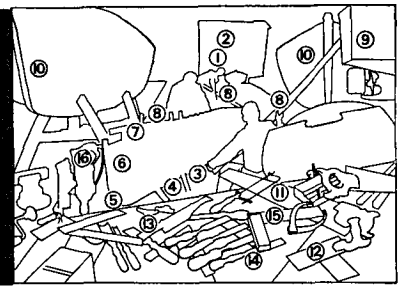
THE BOAT BUILDER



EDGING ON LARNE HARBOUR, crossing point for many travellers to Northern Ireland, is the boatyard of the brothers Adams. Address—Adams Brothers, Larne Harbour, County Antrim. (Shell Touring map No. 10 from your dealer.) Within a stone's throw of the yard is Olderfleet Castle where legend has it Robert The Bruce landed about the year 1300.

The boatyard snuggles amidst a clutter of cottages nestling on a sickle shaped beach looking out over the sheltered waters of Larne Lough **1** towards Islandmagee **2**.

Samuel Adams justifiably boasts he can build any boat but his joy is the construction of small sailing craft of up to twenty-five feet. He speaks with particular pride of the "flying fifteens" which have left his yard for sailing in far-off waters.

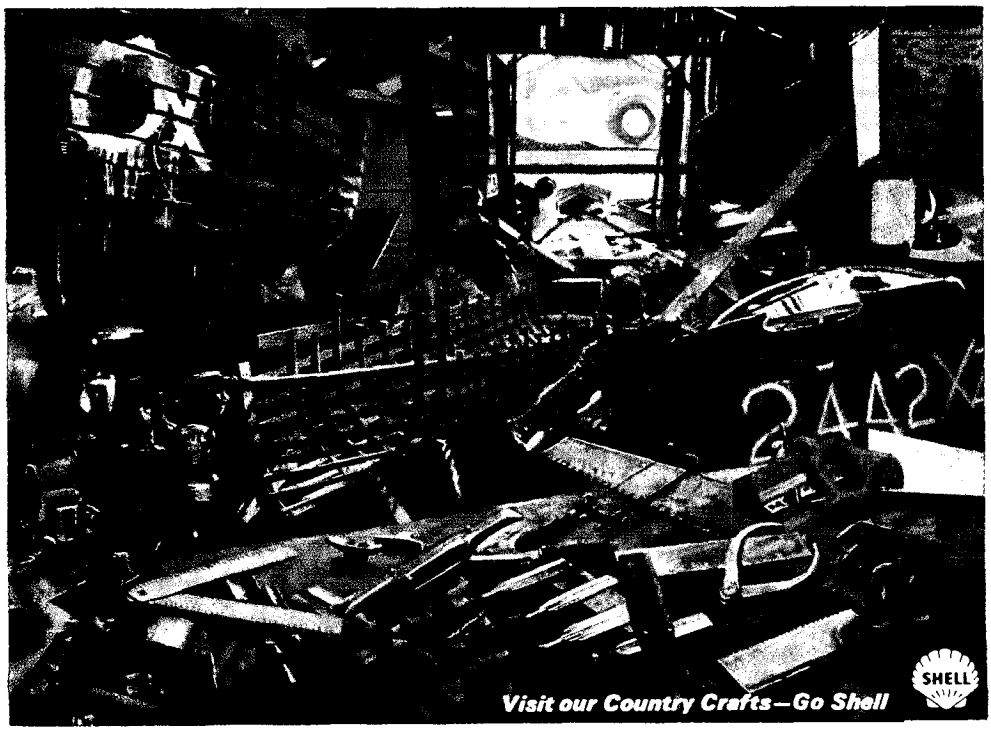
Under construction is the skeleton of a sixteen footer **3**. The keel **4** is of oak and the stem **5** and frame **6** of elm. Elm ribs **7**, first made pliable in a steam box, are bent to fit snugly inside the sweeping contours of the frame. Planks **8**, individually shaped of mahogany or spruce are fixed to the frame with copper nails, butt-jointed for "carvel" **9** and overlapping for "clinker" construction **10**.

Hand tools of the small boatbuilder include a heavy cross-cut **11** and light tenon saw **12**, spokeshave **13** and chisels **14**, a carpenter's square and calipers **15** and an electrically powered hand drill **16**.

In Northern Ireland many traditional crafts are still plied. Why not write for further information to The Northern Ireland Rural Industries Development Committee, 28 Bedford Street, Belfast 2.

New—*The Shell Country Alphabet* by Geoffrey Grigson; an encyclopaedia of countryside knowledge. Michael Joseph. 30/-.

Illustration: Gorgio de Gaspari



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fied to do genuine research work. Marx appeared to him unworthy of such attention: he was a poor historian and a poor economist, blinded by hatred. Why was I not writing about Freud? Freud's importance for historical and biographical science had still been insufficiently appreciated. Freud's books were, unlike those of Marx, works of genius and far better written. Besides which, Freud was still alive and could be interviewed. Marx fortunately, was not; his followers, especially in Russia, which was now intellectually dead, had used up far too much printer's ink, comparable in this respect with German philosophers who suffered from an equal lack of sense of proportion and of literary talent and taste.

He stood in the middle of my room and spoke his words in a slow, somewhat hypnotic voice, with great emphasis and in a continuous unbroken drone, with few intervals between the sentences, a strongly Central European accent and a frozen expression. He kept his eyes immovably upon me, frowning now and then, and producing (I realised later that this was how he drew his breath without seeming to do so) a curious mooing sound which blocked the gaps between his sentences and made interruption literally impossible. Not that I dreamt of interrupting: the entire phenomenon was too strange, the intensity of the utterance too great; I felt that I was being eyed by a stern and heavy headmaster, who knew precisely what I was at, disapproved, and was determined to set me right and to get his instructions obeyed. Finally he stopped and glared in silence. I begged him to sit down. He did so, and went on glaring. I made a halting defence of what I was, in fact, doing. He scarcely listened.

"Marx! Marx!", he kept intoning, "a typical Jewish half-charlatan, who got hold of quite a good idea and then ran it to death just to spite the Gentiles." I asked whether Marx's origin seemed to him relevant to his views. This turned out to be the stimulus that he needed to plunge into his own autobiography. The next two hours were full of interest. He spoke almost continuously.

He told me that he was born the son of a man called Bernstein (or Bernsztajn) the Jewish administrator of a large Polish estate, and that his father had been converted to Roman Catholic faith, which, he said, was common enough in his family's class and circumstances. He had himself been given the education of a young Polish squire, for his parents believed that assimilation to a Polish Catholic pattern was a feasible and desirable process if one wanted it strongly enough.

They supposed that the only barrier between Jews and Gentiles was the difference of religion, that if this were abolished, the social and cultural obstacles which it had historically brought about would fall with it. Conversion could bring about the total integration of the Jews into the prevailing social texture, and would put an end to the insulation, ambiguous status and, indeed, persecution of Jews sensible enough to follow this rational course. His parents' theory was essentially the same as that which had moved Börne and Heine, as well as Heinrich Marx and Isaac Disraeli—two fathers of famous sons—to embrace Christianity. The hypothesis was, in his view, baseless and degrading; and he, Ludwig Bernsztajn as he then was, came to understand this when he was still quite young, sixteen or seventeen. He felt himself in a false position, and realised that the converted Jews in his circle lived in an unreal world—had abandoned the traditional misery of their ancestors only to find themselves in a no-man's land between the two camps, welcome to neither. His father's conventional, bourgeois outlook repelled him in any case. He decided to return to the Jewish community—at any rate in his own mind—partly because he believed that to attempt to cut oneself off from one's own past was self-destructive and shameful, and in any case, impracticable; partly because he wished to show his contempt for his family and their unworthy ideals. His father thought him ungrateful, foolish and perverse, and refused to support him.

He went to England, which to him as to many Central and Eastern European Jews appeared the most civilised and humane society in the world, as well as one respectful of traditions including his own. As part of his general revolt against his father's way of life, which was in his mind associated with the mixture of corruption, hypocrisy and oppression by which the Austro-Hungarian Empire was governed, he was attracted to socialism. The false and humiliating lives lived by his parents and their society seemed to him largely due to systematic delusion about themselves and their position, and, in particular, the attitude towards them of the Poles, whether Austrianised or nationalist,

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among whom they lived. Marxism was the leading philosophy which attempted to explain away and to refute such liberal fantasies as so many disguises intended to conceal an irrational and unjust social order, and one based on ignorance or misinterpretation of the real (largely economic) facts.

WHEN HE ARRIVED in London, he became a student at the London School of Economics, then dominated by the Webbs, Graham Wallas and their followers, who, if not Marxists, were socialists and militantly anti-Liberal. However in due course, he realised that he had simply left one set of delusive ideologies for another. The principles and generalisations of socialism were as silly and unrealistic as those it sought to supplant. The only reality was to be found in the individual and his basic desires—conscious and unconscious, particularly the latter, which were repressed and rationalised by a series of intellectual subterfuges, which Marxism had detected, but for which it had substituted illusions of its own. Individual psychology, not sociology, was the key. Human action —and social reality in general—could be explained only by fearless and dispassionate scientific examination of the roots of individual human behaviour—basic drives, permanent human cravings for food, shelter, power, sexual satisfaction, social recognition and so on. Nor was human history, and in particular political history, to be explained in any other way.

He was not disappointed in England. It took, as he had supposed, a humane, civilised, and, above all, sober, undramatised, empirical view of life. Englishmen seemed to him to take account, more than most men, of the real ends of human life—pleasure, justice, power, freedom, glory, the sense of human solidarity which underlay both patriotism and adherence to tradition; above all they loathed abstract principles and general theories. Human motives could be illuminated by attention to unexamined, occult causes which Freud and other psychologists had begun to investigate. Nevertheless, even such overt considerations as were present to the mind of an average Englishman, far more than to that of, say, an average German or an average Pole, accounted for a great deal of human behaviour—a far larger sector of it than had been explained by the "ideologists."

At some point in this discourse—delivered with a kind of controlled ferocity—Namier spoke (as he often later spoke) of the absurdity of those who attempted to account for human behaviour by invoking the influence of ideas. Ideas were mere interpretations by the mind of deep-seated drives and motives which it was too cowardly, or too conventionally brought up, to face. Historians of ideas were the least useful kind of historians.

"Do you remember?" he asked me, "what Lueger, the anti-semitic Mayor of Vienna, once said to the municipality of Vienna when a subsidy for the natural sciences was asked for? 'Science? That is what one Jew cribs from another.'[2] That is what *I* say about *Ideengeschichte*, history of ideas. . . ." Perhaps he saw a discontented expression on my face, for I well remember that he repeated all this again in still more formidable accents, and emphasised it over and over again in a slow, heavy, drawling voice, as he often did on later occasions.

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS was not the England that he had admired from afar, and he felt this still more strongly when he met it face to face. It was a pathetic offshoot of the worst continental nonsense. He migrated to Balliol College, Oxford, and was there taught history by A. L. Smith and others. Oxford (he continued) had less truck with ideologies: here he could freely profess what he thought to be the deepest factor in modern history—the historically grounded sense of nationality.

The notion that rational men, Jews or Gentiles, could live full lives either by dedication to a religion (organised falsification—rabbis were worse than priests, and lived on and by deception) or by abandoning their religion, or by emigrating to lands beyond the sea, or by any means other than those by which all other human communities had done so, that is, by organising themselves into political units and acquiring a soil of their own—all such notions were sheer nonsense. Self-understanding was everything, both in history and in individual life; and this could be achieved only by scrupulous empiricism, the continuous adaptation of one's hypotheses to the twisted and obscure windings of individual and social lives. Hence his respect for Freud and other psychological theorists—including graphologists, in whom his faith was very strong; and his lack of respect for Marx, who had, indeed, correctly diagnosed the disease, but then had offered a charlatan's

[2] He quoted this with much relish in German: *"Was einer Jude vom andern Juden abschreibt."*

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nostrum. Still, that was better than Burke or Bentham, who peddled mere ideas rooted in nothing, and were rightly distrusted by sensible, practical politicians.

He returned to his autobiography: he had not been too well treated by England. He deserved a permanent post in Oxford which he had not obtained. Scant recognition had been shown him by many established scholars, because they knew that he could "show them up." Nevertheless, it was the only country to live in. It was less fanatical and closer to empirical reality than other nations, and there was in its political tradition a certain realism—some called it cynicism—which was worth all the vapid idealism and idiotic liberalism of the Continent. There were Englishmen who were taken in by continental "isms"—here followed names of some eminent contemporaries—but they were relatively few and not too influential: the majority wisely went by habit and well tried practical rules and kept clear of theory, thereby avoiding much nonsense in their ideas and brutality in their action. He could not talk to English Jews about Zionism. The Jews of England were victims of pathetic illusions—ostriches with their heads in some very inferior sands—foolish, ridiculous creatures not worth saving. But Englishmen understood its appeal and its justification. The only Jew whom he had ever met, who in this respect could be compared to an Englishman was Weizmann—indeed, he was the only Zionist for whom he had complete respect.

Upon this note he ended, and having, as must be supposed, diagnosed me sufficiently—although he took not the slightest notice of my occasional queries—he marched out of my room to tea with Kenneth Bell of Balliol, "whose family is very fond of me" he added.

I felt flattered by his visit, as well as deeply impressed and slightly bewildered by his lecture. In the five or so years before the war I met him more than once. He spoke bitterly about the policy of appeasement. He felt that their sense of reality and their empiricism had evidently deserted the ruling classes in England: not to understand that Hitler meant everything he said—that *Mein Kampf* was to be taken literally—that Hitler had a plan for a war of conquest—was self-deception worthy of Germans or Jews. The Cecils were "all right," they understood reality, they stood for what was most characteristic of England. So was Winston Churchill. The men who opposed Zionism were the same as those who were against Churchill and the policy of national resistance—Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, Chamberlain, Halifax, Toynbee, the officials of the Foreign Office, Archbishop Lang, the bulk of the Conservative Party, most trade unionists. The Cecils, Churchill, true aristocracy, pride, respect for human dignity, traditional virtues, resistance, Zionism, personal grandeur, no nonsense realism, these were fused into one amalgam in his mind. Pro-Germans and pro-Arabs were one gang.

He spoke a good deal about Zionism to me, no doubt because he thought (rightly) that I was sympathetic. Gradually I became convinced that this was the deepest strain in him: and that he was fundamentally driven into it by sheer pride. He found the position of the Jews to be humiliating: he disliked those who put up with this or pretended that it did not exist. He wanted a free and dignified existence. He was intelligent enough to realise that to shed his Judaism, to assume protective colouring and disappear into the Gentile world, was not feasible and a pathetic form of self-deception. If he was not to sink to the level of the majority of his brethren (whom on the whole he despised), if he had to remain one of them, as was historically inevitable, then there was only one way out—they must be pulled up to his own level. If this could not be achieved by slow, gradual, peaceful, kindly means, then it must be achieved by rapid, and, if need be, somewhat drastic ones. He had not believed this to be wholly possible until he had met Weizmann, whom he admired to the point of hero-worship: here at least was a Jew with whom he did not find it embarrassing to associate, indeed, even to follow. But the other Zionist leaders appeared nonentities to him and he did not trouble to conceal this. He called them "the rabbis" and said that they were no better than priests and clergymen—to him, then, terms of abuse. His Zionist colleagues valued his gifts but could scarcely be expected to enjoy his open and highly articulate contempt. Despite Weizmann's favour, he was never made a member of the World Zionist Executive—a fact that rankled with him for the rest of his life.

Despite all his talk of realism and his historical method, he had the temperament of a political romantic. I am not sure that he did not indulge in day-dreams in which he saw

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himself as a kind of Zionist D'Annunzio riding on a white horse to capture some Trans-Jordanian Fiume. He saw the Jewish national movement as a *Risorgimento*; if he was not to be its Garibaldi, he would serve as the adviser and champion of its Cavour—the sagacious, realistic, dignified, Europeanised, the almost English, Dr. Weizmann.

PRIVATELY I used to think that in character if not in ideas, Namier was not wholly unlike his *bête noire*, Karl Marx. He too was an intellectually formidable, at times aggressive, politically minded intellectual—and his hatred of doctrine was held with a doctrinaire tenacity. Like Marx, he was vain, proud, contemptuous, intolerant, quick to give and take offence, master of his craft, confident of his own powers, not without a strain of pathos and self pity. Like Marx he hated all forms of weakness, sentimentality, idealistic liberalism; most of all he hated servility. Like Marx, he fascinated his interlocutors and oppressed them too. If you happened to be interested in the topic which he was discussing (Polish documents relating to the Revolution of 1848 or English country houses), you were fortunate, for it was not likely that you would again hear the subject expounded with such learning, brilliance and originality. If, however, you were not interested, you could not escape.

Hence those who met him were divided into some who looked on him as a man of genius and a dazzling talker and others who fled from him as an appalling bore. He was, in fact, both. He aroused admiration, enthusiasm and affection among his pupils and those who were sympathetic to his opinions; uneasy respect and embarrassed dislike among those who did not. If he came across latent anti-semitism he stirred it into a flame; London clubmen (whom he often naïvely pursued) viewed him with distaste. Academics and civil servants, whom he bullied, loathed and denigrated him. Scholars looked on him as a man of prodigious powers and treated him with deep, if, at times, somewhat nervous, admiration.

I NEVER EXPERIENCED boredom in his company, not even when he was at his most ponderous. All the subjects that he discussed appeared to me, at any rate while he spoke about them, interesting and important; when on form he spoke marvellously. He spoke with sovereign, and often wholly unmitigated, contempt about other scholars, and indeed most other human beings. The only living persons wholly exempt from his disparagement were Winston Churchill, who could do no wrong; Weizmann, in whose presence Namier was simple, childlike, reverent, uncritical to the point of worship; and his great friend Blanche Dugdale, Balfour's niece. He was said to be transformed in her presence, but I never saw them together.

Nor do I know how he felt and what he said in the country houses which he visited for the purpose of examining their muniments and family papers. His pleasure in staying in them was part of the romantic Anglomania which remained with him to the end of his days. The English aristocracy was for him bathed in a heavenly light. His interest in history is certainly not alone sufficient to explain this radiant vision. Rather it is probably the other way about: his interest in the history of individual members of the English Parliament during a time when many of them were members of (or closely connected with) a powerful and gifted Whig aristocracy, was due to his idealisation of this style of life. He has, at times, been accused of being a snob. There is something in this; but Namier's snobbery was of the Proustian kind—peers, members of the aristocracy, rich, proud, self-possessed, independent, freedom loving to the point of eccentricity—such Englishmen were for him works of art which he studied with devoted, indeed, fanatical attention and discrimination. He was not carried away by the fascination of this world as Oscar Wilde, or even Henry James, appear to have been. He was content to remain an outsider. He gloried in his vision of the English national character, its strength and its foibles, and remained a lifelong passionate addict to a single human species, to the analysis, and, inevitably, celebration of which, his life—for psychological reasons which Freud had certainly not helped him to understand—was devoted. He studied every detail in the life of the English governing class, as Marx studied the proletariat, not in detail, but as a social formation; in each case from an outside vantage point which they did not bother to emphasise or deny.

HIS ORIGINS obsessed him. His morbid hatred of obsequiousness, which may have had something to do with his memories of Poles and Jews in Galicia, often took ferocious forms. Meeting me in the corridor of a train, he said, apropos of nothing: "I have been visit-

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ing Lord Derby. He said to me: 'Namier, you are a Jew. Why do you write our English history, why do you not write Jewish history?' I replied, 'Derby! There is no Jewish history, only a Jewish martyrology, and that is not amusing enough for me....'"

He spoke of Jews as "my co-racials," and clearly enjoyed the embarrassing effect which this word produced on Jew and Gentile alike. In All Souls one afternoon someone in his presence—he was in the Common Room at tea as a guest—defended the German claim to colonies, a topic then much in the air. Namier rose, glared round the room, fixed a basilisk-like eye on one of his fellow-guests whom he had, mistakenly as it turned out, assumed to be a German, and said loudly *"Wir Juden und die andere farbigen meinen anders."*[3]

He savoured the effect of these startling words with great satisfaction. He was an out and out nationalist, and did not disguise his far from fraternal feelings towards the Arabs in Palestine, about whom his position was more intransigent than that of the majority of his fellow Zionists. I well recollect a meeting to interview candidates for a post in English in the University of Jerusalem, at which Namier would fix some timid lecturer from, say, Nottingham, with his baleful, annihilating glare, and say: "Mr. Levy, can you shoot?" The candidate would mutter something—"Because if you take this post, you will have to shoot. You will have to shoot our Arab cousins. Because if you do not shoot them, they will shoot you." Stunned silence. "Mr. Levy, will you please answer my question: can you shoot?..." Some of the candidates withdrew. No appointment was made.

As THE THIRTIES wore on and the position of the West steadily deteriorated, Namier grew steadily gloomier and more ferocious. He would visit me in All Souls, and later in New College, and say that as war was now inevitable, he proposed to sell his life as dearly as possible, and painted imaginary pictures involving the extermination of a good many Nazis by all kinds of diabolical means. The position of Zionism—one of the victims of British foreign policy at this time—depressed him further. The villains in his eyes were not so much the Conservative leaders—some of those were members of the aristocracy and as such enjoyed a certain degree of exemption from blame—but the Arab-loving "pen-pushers of the Foreign Office" and the "hypocritical idiots of the Colonial Office." He would lie in wait for these—particularly the latter, in the Athenaeum. There he would drive some unsuspecting official into the corner of the Smoking Room, where he would treat him to a terrifying homily which the victim would not soon forget, and which would probably increase his already violent antipathy to Zionism in general and Namier in particular.

Sir John Shuckburgh, then the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Colonial Office, was a not infrequent target for Namier when he was on the war-path. I was once present when Namier, in his soft but penetrating and remorseless voice, addressed Shuckburgh who made every effort to escape; in vain. Namier followed him out of the room, on to the steps, into the street, and so on—down the Duke of York's steps, probably to the door of the Colonial Office itself.

Politically he was as great a liability to his party as he was an asset to it intellectually. His final and most savagely treated victim was Malcolm MacDonald, the Colonial Secretary himself. In 1939, after the Chamberlain government's White Paper on Palestine, which seemed to put an end to all Zionist hopes, Namier came to lunch with Professor Reginald Coupland at All Souls. Coupland was the effective author of the Peel Report on Palestine, probably the most valuable document ever composed on that agonising subject. Coupland had spoken bitterly of the shameful betrayal of the Palestine Jews by the British Government, and said that he would write a letter to *The Times* pointing out the shortcomings of both Chamberlain and Malcolm MacDonald. Namier said that he had his own method of dealing with such cases. He had met Malcolm MacDonald somewhere in London.

"I spoke to him. I began with a jest. I said that in the eighteenth century peers made their tutors Under-Secretaries, whereas in the twentieth Under-Secretaries made their tutors peers. He did not seem to understand. I did not bother to explain.[4] Then I said something he

[3] "We Jews and the other coloured peoples think otherwise."

[4] Only Namier would have supposed that the average educated Englishman (or Scotsman) would realise that he was referring to the fact that the philosopher Locke had been made an Under-Secretary by his ex-pupil, Lord Shaftesbury, and that Mr. Godfrey Elton, who had been Malcolm MacDonald's tutor at Queen's College, Oxford, had recently been elevated to the peerage.

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would understand. I said to him, 'Malcolm' —he is, you know, still Malcolm to me—I know him quite well—'I am writing a new book.' He said, 'What is it Lewis?' I replied, 'I will tell you what it is. I have called it *The Two MacDonalds: A Study in Treachery.*'..."

I do not know whether Namier had actually said this; he supposed that he had and was certainly capable of it. It was, again, not unlike Karl Marx at his most vindictive, and, like Marx's insults, was intended to draw blood. Yet he was surprised by the fact that he was feared and disliked widely.

IN 1941 I was employed by the Ministry of Information in New York, and there I met a man who threw a good deal of light on Namier's younger days. His name was Max Hammerling, and his father had been associated with Josef Bernsztajn, Namier's father, in the management of his estate near Lemberg in Galicia, long before the First World War. The younger Hammerling was a warm sympathiser with the British cause, and got in touch with me to offer his help at a time when Britain was fighting Hitler alone. In the course of general conversation he asked me if I knew a man called Professor Namier, and was surprised to hear that I did. He said that he used to see him in earlier years, but that since then the connection had ended and he was anxious to hear what had happened to the son of his father's associate.

Hammerling Senior had, so his son told me, emigrated to America and acquired control of one or more of the foreign-language periodicals of New York in the years before the First World War. The young Namier first arrived in New York in 1913 with very little money—supplied by his father—to engage in research on the American War of Independence. Josef Bernsztajn had made an arrangement with his old associate under which Hammerling engaged Namier to write leading articles to be syndicated and translated for a section of his publications. Namier wrote these articles at night, and worked in the New York Public Library in the day-time, and in this way kept body and soul together. According to Max Hammerling, Namier viewed the continued existence of the Dual Monarchy with extreme disfavour, and was a vigorous champion of the *Entente cordiale.* Hammerling Senior had many Roman Catholic readers and had no great wish to alienate the Roman Church in the United States which was on the whole pro-Austrian and isolationist. When Namier's articles became too violently interventionist, he was told to moderate them: he ignored hints and requests; matters came to a head, and his employment came to an end in the spring of 1914.

It was then that Namier, without any obvious means of subsistence, returned to England and was given a grant by Balliol College which enabled him to continue his research. Namier told me that the news of the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was brought to the Editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson, in All Souls after dinner. Namier who happened to be there too, announced to Dawson and his friends that war was now imminent. Dawson indicated that he did not believe this (he laboured under similar delusions in 1938–9) and turned to other topics.

WHEN WAR WAS DECLARED Namier volunteered for the British Army. He was evidently not a perfect soldier. Some intelligent person took him out of the army, and put him into the Foreign Office as adviser on Polish affairs attached to the Historical Adviser to the Foreign Office, Sir John Headlam-Morley.

"I remember," said Namier to me, "the day in 1918 when the Emperor Karl sued for peace. I said to Headlam-Morley: 'Wait.' Headlam-Morley said to Balfour: 'Wait.' Balfour said to Lloyd George: 'Wait.' Lloyd George said to Wilson: 'Wait.' And while they waited, the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated.[5] I may say that I pulled it to pieces with my own hands."

Apart from feeling convinced that the Polish National Democratic Party was plotting his assassination, Namier enjoyed his work in the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office showed no desire to retain Namier on its staff after the war, nor did the Treasury, with which he also was temporarily connected. Nor did Balliol College, Oxford, which made him a temporary lecturer for a while—his most devoted Oxford pupils date from this period. Thereupon he left England for Vienna, and there made a few thousand pounds. In the early 'twenties he came back to London with his exiguous capital. Here his extraordinary character showed itself at its fullest.

[5] Namier *pronounced this word very slowly,* syllable by syllable, which heightened the dramatic climax of his narrative.

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He did not do what others might have been tempted to do: he did not try to spend as little as possible while looking for a means of subsistence: he knew that he had it in him to write an original and important book and decided to do so. He spoke of this to friends and allies (some of them connected with the Round Table group of Liberal Imperialists with whose ideas Namier had been in sympathy during the war). He told them that he needed money to write a book; he held out no promise of repayment; the money was to be regarded as an investment in learning and in that alone. Philip Kerr, who was among those approached, told me (in Washington in 1940 where he was by then Lord Lothian and British Ambassador) that he did not find Namier congenial company, but was overawed by his leonine personality and felt him to be a man of unusual intellectual power. He and his friends obtained a grant for him; he was also supported by at least one private person. Namier felt no false shame in accepting such patronage; this was usual enough in that best of all periods, the later years of the eighteenth century. He felt that he had as good a claim as Burke, or any other talented writer of the past, whom the rich and the powerful should be proud to support; and he bound his spell upon his "patrons," who as he had always known, had no cause to regret their generosity.

The books that he wrote did what he wished them to do: they transformed the standards of historical scholarship (and to some degree the style of historical writing) in England for at least a quarter of a century.

HAVING DISCHARGED this intellectual obligation, Namier threw himself, in the later 'twenties, with passion and ferocity into political work in the Zionist Organisation. This gave full play to his formidable gifts: his polemical skill, his sense of history, his pride, his nationalism, his passion for exposing weakness, cowardice, lies and unworthy motives. He derived deep satisfaction from those labours. In the course of them, he managed to irritate and humiliate his less talented collaborators, to impress some members of the British intelligentsia, astonish and anger others, and permanently upset and infuriate a number of influential officials in the Foreign and Colonial Offices. After the Second World War, when it became plain that his unwavering and withering contempt for most of his Zionist colleagues had made it certain that if an independent Jewish establishment ever emerged he would not be amongst its guides, he turned his back upon Zionist politics, without changing his moral or political convictions.

He returned to the study of history. He hoped and expected, not without reason, that he might yet be appointed to a post by his *alma mater*. This was not to be. Whenever a Chair in History (or International Relations, on which, too, he had made himself a leading expert), fell vacant, his name inevitably came up and was duly dismissed. Those responsible for such appointments in Oxford often said that it was a crying shame that some other group of electors had failed to appoint Namier to one or other of the three or four Chairs for which his distinction fitted him pre-eminently. But when their own turn came, such electors or advisers acted precisely like their predecessors. He was invariably passed over. Various reasons were adduced: that his field of specialisation was too narrow; that he was politically intemperate, as his Zionism or his low opinion of pre-war British foreign policy plainly showed; that he would be too arrogant to his colleagues or too exacting to his students; that he would be a terrible bore, intolerable at meal times to the Fellows of this or that college.

The quality of his genius was not seriously disputed: but this was not regarded as a sufficiently weighty factor. He had made some implacable enemies. Yet, despite his acuteness, he was an unworldly man, and in personal matters clumsy, innocent and childlike. He was easily deceived: he took flattery for true coin. He often had no notion of who was covertly working against him: he was totally incapable of manoeuvre or intrigue. He achieved everything by the sheer weight of his huge intellectual armour. He misjudged motives and often could not tell friends from ill-wishers. He fell into traps and remained to his dying day unaware of this. He was an Othello who retained confidence in more than one minor academic Iago. His failure to obtain an Oxford Chair ate into his soul, as it has into those of others similarly treated.

"I will tell you how they make professors in Oxford," he said bitterly to me during the period when he was delivering the Waynflete Lectures at Magdalen College shortly after the end of the Second World War. "In the eighteenth century there was a club called the Koran Club. The qualification for membership was to have

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travelled in the East. Then it was found that there were various persons whom it was thought desirable to make members of the club and who had not travelled in the East. So the rules were changed from 'travelling in the East' to 'expressing a wish to travel in the East.' That is how they make professors in Oxford. . . . Do not," he added, "let this story go too far."

He continued to teach at Manchester, but finally moved to London and was entrusted with the formidable enterprise of the History of Parliament to be done in his own fashion—by means of detailed microscopically-examined lives of all who ever were members of it. Honours were showered upon him in England and abroad, but nothing made up for the Oxford disappointment. Balliol made him an Honorary Fellow. Two honorary doctorates were conferred upon him by the University. He delivered the Romanes Lecture. But although this pleased him, as did his knighthood, the old scar remained and troubled him.

It was at this period that he married for the second time (his first marriage had not lasted long—his wife is said to have been a Muslim and died during the second war). He was converted to the Anglican faith, and his marriage to Julia de Beausobre finally ended the period of acute loneliness and bitter personal unhappiness, mitigated by rare moments of pride and joy, which had begun for him after the First World War. Dr. Friedrich Waismann, an eminent Austrian philosopher whom he had met during his years in Vienna, told me that he had never in his life met an intellectually more gifted, penetrating and fascinating man, or one more deeply plunged in the most hopeless misery and solitude.

His conversion to Christianity cost him the friendship of Dr. Weizmann, who did not wish to examine the reasons for this step, but reacted instinctively, as his fathers would have done before him, to what he regarded as an act of apostasy for which no decent motive could exist. This, of course, hurt Namier deeply, but his marriage had created a new life for him and he bore such things more easily. He visited the state of Israel after Weizmann's death, was profoundly moved, but remained implacably opposed to the rabbis and complained of clerical tyranny.

When I made light of this to him he turned upon me sternly and said, "You do not know rabbis and priests as I do—they can ruin any country. Clergymen are harmless. Nobody ever speaks of being in the hands of the clergymen as they do of the Jesuits and, I fear now, should do of rabbis."

During this period I would receive occasional visits from him in Oxford. He had grown mellower with age; he was happier because his domestic life was serene, and because adequate recognition had been given him at last. He took criticism as painfully as ever: when his friend and disciple Alan Taylor wrote an insufficiently respectful review of a collection of his essays in the *Manchester Guardian*, he, like Marx, took this as a symptom of failing powers on the part of the critic.

He invested a great deal in his few personal relationships, and breaches were particularly painful to him. His relations with Taylor suffered further deterioration, in large as a result of the role which Taylor believed him to have played in the choice of the successor to Professor H. V. Galbraith as Regius Professor of History in Oxford. Taylor was not appointed; he blamed Namier for failing to support him sufficiently when he could have done so, and broke off relations. Namier was genuinely fond of him—fonder of him than of most men. He told me that some of his happiest hours had been spent at Taylor's house; that one must be careful—more careful than he had been—in one's human relations; but that Taylor, whose gifts were so extraordinary, had disappointed him by what he considered his addiction to popular journalism.

"And if I have hurt *your* feelings," he said to me, "I apologise also. I am not always too careful." This was a touching and handsome reference to the fact that I had sent him the printed version of a lecture on an abstract subject, which he had acknowledged with the words, "You must indeed be a very clever man to understand what you write." This was a characteristic gibe aimed at the philosophy of history—a subject which he believed to be bogus, and which had been the subject of my lecture.

I was delighted by his letter, which could not have been regarded as offensive by any normal person, still less by anyone who knew Namier and took pleasure in his prejudices and absurdities. E. H. Carr, who was a common friend, came to visit me on the day when I received it, and I read him Namier's letter with great relish. Carr was somehow responsible for the appearance of Namier's comment in a gossip

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column of the *Daily Express*. Namier was horrified, and wrote to me immediately to explain that he had not, of course, meant to insult either me or the subject of my lecture. My reassurances did not convince him. It had been very wrong of E. H. Carr to stoop to supplying tittle tattle to the *Daily Express*—serious journalism was, of course, another matter. How could such serious, learned, gifted men, Taylor, Carr, Fellows of the British Academy, who had it in them to give so much to historical study, compromise the dignity of their calling—and of academic life generally—by associating with the enemies of learning, however entertaining and informative? And in so public a fashion? At least Professor Butterfield, than whom no one was more mistaken, did not dabble in this.

My defence fell on deaf ears: an idealised image, which he had carried with him for the greater part of his life—the image of the scholar, and perhaps also of the Englishman—had in some way been damaged, and this was almost more painful than a personal attack.

He spoke often of the dignity of learning: of the need to keep scholarship pure, of protecting it from its three greatest enemies: amateurism, journalistic prostitution, and obsession with doctrine. "An amateur," he declared in one of his typical apophthegms, "An amateur is a man who thinks more about himself than about his subject," and he mentioned a younger colleague whom he suspected of a wish to glitter.

He passionately believed in professionalism in every field: he denounced fine writing: and still more, a desire to startle or shock the reader, whether he was a member of the general public or of the world of scholars. He spoke with indignation about those who had accused him of wishing to reassess the character and historical influence of George III out of a desire to dish the Whigs and attack their values and their heroes. He would solemnly and with deep sincerity assure me that his sole purpose was to reconstruct the facts and explain them by the use of well tested, severely empirical methods; that his only reason for distrusting party labels and professions of political ideals in the eighteenth century was his conviction—based on incontrovertible documentary and other factual evidence—that such labels and professions disguised the truth, often from the agents themselves. His own psychological tenets, on which these exposures were in part based, seemed to him confirmed over and over again by the historical evidence—the actual transactions of the politicians and their agents and their kinsfolk—which were susceptible of one and only one true explanation. Whether or not he was mistaken in this, he believed profoundly that he was guided not by theories but by the facts and by them alone. As for the question of what was a fact, what constituted evidence, this was a philosophical issue—something from which he shied with all the force of his whole abstraction-hating, anti-philosophical nature.

Journalism—the desire to *épater*, to entertain, to be brilliant—was, in men of learning, mere irresponsibility. "Irresponsible" was one of the most opprobrious terms in his vocabulary. His belief in the moral duties of historians and scholars generally was Kantian in its severity and genuineness. As for doctrinaire obsessions, that again appeared to him as a form of culpable self indulgence—wanton escape from the duty of following minutely wherever they led, the often complex, convoluted empirical paths constituted by the "facts," into some symmetrical pattern invented by the historian to indulge his own metaphysical or moral predilection; alternatively it was a quasi-pathological intellectual obsession which rendered the historian incapable of seeing *"wie es eigentlich gewesen."* Hence Namier's distaste for, and ironies at the expense of, philosophical historians; and the emphasis on material factors and distrust of ideal ones. This was odd in a man who was himself governed by so many ideals and indeed prejudices: nationalism and national character, love of traditional "roots," *la terre en les morts*, disbelief in the efficacy of intellectuals and theorisers, faith in individual psychology, even in graphology, as a key to character and action. But it was so.

It is not perhaps too extravagant to classify his essentially deflationary tendency—the desire to reduce both the general propositions and the impressionism of historians to hard pellet-like "facts," to bring everything down to brass tacks—to regard this as part of the dominant intellectual trend of his age and milieu. It was in Vienna, after all, that Ernst Mach enunciated the principles of "economy of thought" and tried to reduce physical phenomena to clusters of identifiable, almost isolable, sensations; that Freud looked for "material," empirically testable causes of psychical phenomena; that the Vienna Circle of philosophers generated the verification principle as a weapon against vagueness, transcendenta-

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lism, theology, metaphysics; that the *Bauhaus* with its clear, rational lines had its origin in the ideas of Adolf Loos and his disciples. Vienna was the centre of the new anti-metaphysical and anti-impressionist positivism.

Whether he knew this or not—and nobody could protest more vehemently against such ideological categorisation—this was the world from which Namier came. Its most original thinkers had reacted violently against German metaphysics and had found British empiricism sympathetic. In philosophy they achieved a celebrated and fruitful symbiosis with British thought. Namier was one of the boldest and most revolutionary pioneers of the application of this very method to history. The method—especially in the work of his followers—had been criticised as having gone too far—"taken the mind out of history." This kind of criticism has been levelled no less at the corresponding schools of philosophy, art, architecture, psychology. Whether the charge is just or not, even its sharpest critics can scarcely deny the value and importance of the early impact of the new method. It opened windows, let in air, revealed new horizons, made men see what they had not seen before. In this great constructive-destructive movement Namier was a major figure.

NAMIER'S most striking personal characteristics were an unremittingly active intellectual power, independence, lack of fear and an unswerving devotion to his chosen method. This method had yielded him rich fruit, and he would not modify it merely because it seemed extreme or fanatical to eclectics or philistines.

Like Marx, like Darwin, like Freud, he was severely anti-eclectic. Nor did he believe in practising moderation or introducing qualifications simply in order to avoid charges of extremism, to please men of good sense. Indeed, anxiety to please in any fashion, still less appeasement of critics, was remote from his temperament. He believed that objective truth could be discovered, and that he had found a method of doing so in history; that this method consisted in a sort of *pointillisme*, "the microscopic method," the splitting up of social facts into details of individual lives—atomic entities, the careers of which could be precisely verified; and that these atoms could then be integrated into greater wholes. This was the nearest to scientific method that was attainable in history, and he would adhere to it at whatever cost, in spite of all criticism, until and unless he became convinced by internal criteria of its inadequacy, because it had failed to produce results verified by research.

This psychological Cartesianism was his weapon against impressionism and dilletantism of every kind. Kant had said that nature would yield up her secrets only under torture, only if specific questions were put to her. Namier believed this of history. The questions had to be formulated in such a way as to be answerable. He was a child of a positivistic, deflationary, anti-romantic age, and his deep natural romanticism came out in other—political—directions. Dedicated historian that he was, he deliberately confined himself to his atomic data. He did indeed split up and reduce his material to tiny fragments, then he reintegrated them with a marvellous power of imaginative generalisation as great as that of any other historian of his time. He was not primarily a narrative historian, and he did, perhaps, underestimate the importance and the influence of ideas. He admired individual greatness, he despised equality, mediocrity, stupidity; he worshipped political and personal liberty. His attitude to economic facts was at best ambivalent: and he was a very half-hearted determinist in his writing of history, whatever he may have said about it in his theoretical essays. Materialism, excessive determinism, were criticisms levelled against him, but it fits better those historians who, using the method without the genius, tend towards pedantry and timidity, where he was boldly constructive, intuitive, and untrammelled.

He thought in large terms. The care with which he examined and described the individual trees did not obscure his vision of the wood for the sake of which the huge accumulation and the minute analyses had been undertaken; the end, at any rate in the works of his best period, is never lost to view; the reader is not cluttered with detail, never feels that he is in the grasp of an avid fact gatherer who cannot let anything go, a fanatical antiquary who can no longer distinguish between the trivial and the important.

Perhaps, towards the end of his life, trees and even shrubs did begin to obscure his vision of the wood. But when he was at his best he might well have said, echoing Marx, for whom he had so little respect and by whose method he was in practice much influenced *"Surtout, je ne suis pas namieriste."*

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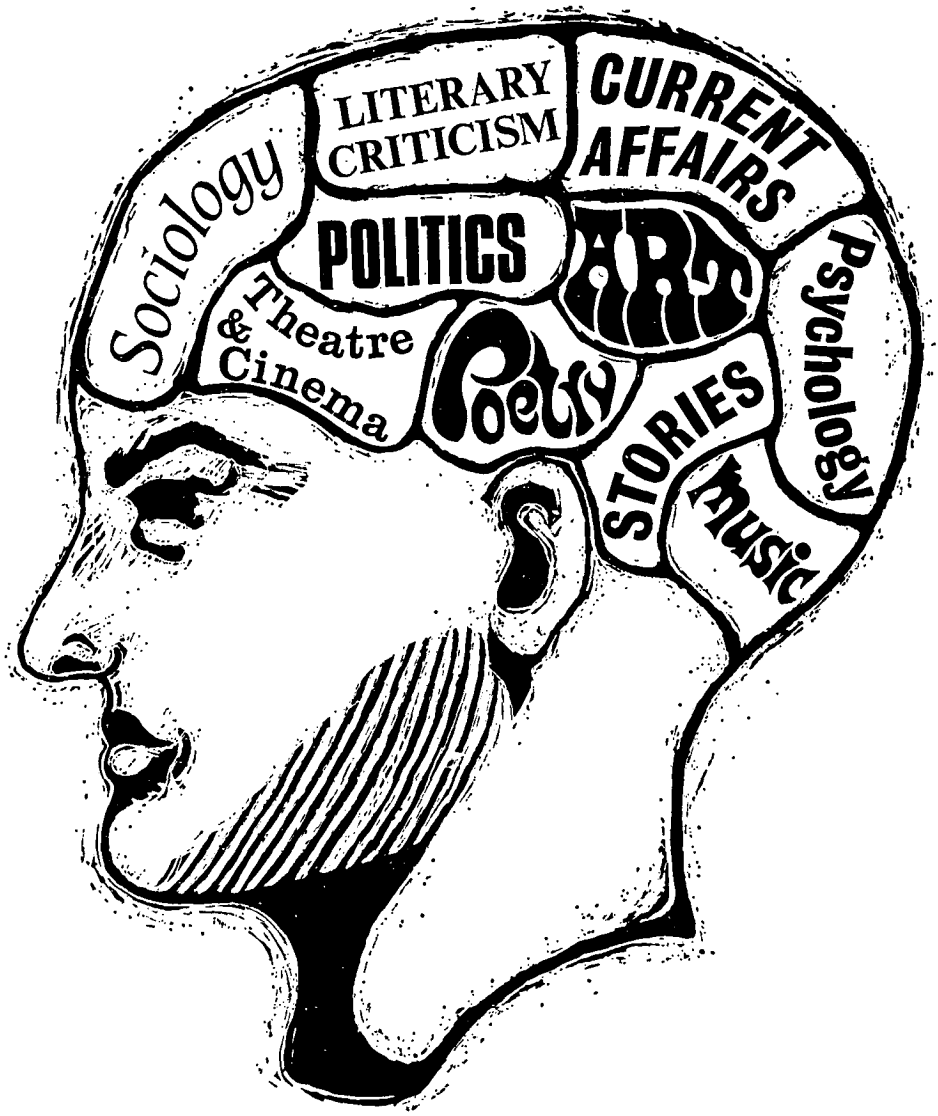

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D. J. Enright

Processional

For William Walsh

Where are they all?—
The Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor,
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar,
The Bursar, the Deans of the several Faculties,
The Director of Extra-Mural Studies,
The Estate Officer and the Librarian,
The Chairman of the University Council,
The Esquire Bedell and the Public Orator?

For the scaffolding has collapsed, the
Scaffolding of the prospective Science Tower,
Has collapsed, with the long thin noise of the
Crumbling of a termite-riddled ivory tower.
And underneath are two female labourers,
Searched for by their colleagues like buried and
Perishable treasure. Now a trousered leg is
Uncovered, and pulled upon, and at its end is an
Ivory visage, a whitened stage concubine's,
Slashed with a vulgar wash of red.

And where is the University Health Physician?
(He is sick, he has left, he is on sick leave.)

And first will arrive the Fire Brigade,
With their hoses and helmets and hatchets
To exhume the already exhumed. And then
The police car with its mild unworried policemen
And somniferous radio. And last of all,
In accordance with protocol, the ambulance,
To remove whatever the firemen and policemen
Are no longer interested in.

But where are they all?—
The Development and Public Relations Officer
And the various Assistant Registrars,
The Vice-Dean and the Sub-Dean of Law,
The Chairman of the Senior Common Room
Committee,
The Acting Head of the School of Education,
The Readers and the Senior Lecturers
(The Professors we know are all at work),
And the Presidents respectively of the Local and
The Expatriate Academic Staff Associations?
This is a bad day for an accident.

Till a clerk arrives, a clerk from the
Administration, to administer the matter.
And order is imposed and sense is made.
The scaffolding consisted of old wood left out
Too long in the monsoon rains, and the women
Took too much sand up with them, because the
Contractor told them to get a move on, since he
Was hurrying to finish the job, because. . .
And they fell through four floors,
Carrying the scaffolding with them at each floor,
The sodden planking and the bamboo poles,
And now the scaffolding and the sand and the
Labourers all lie scattered on the ground.
The day and the hour are determined, and the
Victims identified as One Science Tower
(Uncompleted) and Two Labourers, Female, Chinese,
Aged about 20 and 40 respectively,
Who also look rather incomplete.

The Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor,
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar. . .
There was little occasion for them after all.
The accident has been thoroughly administered—
Moved and seconded, carried and minuted.
A gaggle of idle Assistant Lecturers tap
On their watches, seditiously timing
The ambulance. And in the distance
The fire engine's bell can be heard already.

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Column

WHAT SHOULD one read on holidays? The problem is for me a perennial one, and the moment of departure is always spoiled by nagging doubts whether one has taken enough or the right kind of books for the idle weeks ahead. Perhaps, for one whose main occupations are in any case reading and writing, the right answer would be to take no books at all, so that for once one might really think one's own thoughts, instead of the reflections of others; perhaps one ought to leave literature behind, as some people leave their business or their profession or their household duties, and for once try to see the world as it must appear to millions of others, that is to say, a world in which books play no part at all, and on which they throw none of their illusory lights and shadows.

But for me at least that would be an impossibility and a holiday without books would be a form of penal servitude. And this year one of my holiday's greatest pleasures has been to read *Henry Moore on Sculpture* (Macdonald, 6 gns.), admirably edited and introduced by Philip James. And not merely to read, but to look at; for the volume is so profusely illustrated, and each illustration is not merely beautiful in itself but so vividly illuminates the text, that its effect is that of walking through some endless gallery of sculptures, both of Moore and of those he most admires, while at one's shoulder one of the truly great artists of our age tells one what these marvellous works have meant to him and how, as if by a miracle, they came into being. It seems only sad that the book is so expensive as to be beyond the means of many to whom it would give a pleasure as great as mine.

No one, I think, looking at its illustrations, could doubt Moore's greatness as a sculptor, just as Moore as a young man did not doubt the greatness of a Mexican reclining figure of a rain spirit seen in reproduction in a German publication. But after all we also have the originals to look at, not only in galleries or museums or churches, but set in the English countryside out of which they seem to have grown as naturally as rocks and stones and trees. What is particularly valuable about the book is the light it throws on the process of creation which brought these works into existence, on the kind of hand which carved them and the eye which directed it, on the immensely delicate and complicated interactions between the internal and the external world which form the material of a work of art.

Artists of Moore's stature do not often care to explain to us the genesis, or the natural history, of what they have created. Why should they? It is the act of creation itself that they care about. They have a natural instinct that in trying to explain themselves they may in some way waste or obstruct the mysterious powers with which they are endowed, and if we have eyes to see, they have already told us everything they have to say. As Moore himself says: "It is a mistake for a sculptor or a painter to speak or write often about his job. It releases tension needed for his work."

Yet, as Philip James notes in his excellent introduction, "It is likely that a sculptor can give, from his own conscious experience, clues which will help others in their own approach to sculpture." In this book, which is compiled from lectures, articles, interviews, and verbal and written statements of Moore's, these clues, which is precisely what they are, because no one, not even the artist himself, could ever achieve any final formulation, are offered to us in marvellous profusion. They indicate the process by which Moore, starting as a young man who totally rejected Western European forms of sculpture, both Greek and Renaissance, in favour of primitive, tribal and in particular Mexican art, came to include those also in the motives which inspired his work; the parallel process by which his ideas of the paramount importance of "truth to material" developed into the belief that the sculptor should be the master, not the servant of his material, "*Only,* not a cruel master"; the close and intimate relation which even the most abstract forms he employs have to natural objects like pebbles, shells, fossils, rocks, tree trunks, landscapes; his daily and obsessive search for shapes and structures in the natural world which would help him to find a concrete equivalent for his ideas and emotions; the importance of the empty space in his sculpture as a means to "connecting one side to the other" and of "opening out" the mass, "the mystery of the hole—the mysterious fascination of caves in hill-sides and cliffs."

ALL THESE "CLUES" are fascinating for the light they throw not only on Moore's own work but on the kind of problems with which sculptors in general are concerned in their art, even though they may solve them in other ways than Moore. And it increases one's admiration for Moore, as a man as well as a sculptor, that in his exposition of these problems he shows a

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kind of inspired common sense, a practical wisdom, which is not often found in discussions of aesthetics; he speaks and writes like a man with the tools of his trade in his hands, explaining to us, in the most concrete terms, what he wants to do with them. This kind of writing about art is rare at any period; today, perhaps, it is all the more valuable because of the immense and growing gap which exists between the genuine artist, with the particular vision which Moore makes so vivid to us in these pages, and the public on which he depends for appreciation of his work. There is today a vast industry, in which fashion, the mass media, education, government patronage, "pop" manifestations of every variety, commercial enterprise, desperately try to fill this gap; but alas! for the most part they offer us, not a bridge over which we may pass into the mind and workshop of the artist, but only yet another means of dividing us from them.

In this book, it is precisely such a bridge which Philip James has offered us, and one is all the more grateful for it because of the particular version of the artist's faith which Moore represents. For out of all the influences which have helped to form his own original and unique contribution to the art of our time, what has emerged is a particular form of humanism which has the same kind of nobility which he finds in the artists he admires most—a nobility which is not to be found, for instance, even in so great a painter as Picasso. It is something far apart from, and far deeper than, the kind of humanism which expresses itself in ethical, or social, or even aesthetic abstractions, however admirable these may sometimes happen to be; perhaps because it is concerned as much, or more, with the power and vitality of art as with its goodness or beauty.

> For me a work must have a vitality of its own. I do not mean a reflection of the vitality of life, of movement, physical action, frisking, dancing figures and so on, but that a work can have in it a pent-up energy, an intense life of its own, independent of the object it may represent. When a work has this powerful vitality we do not connect the word Beauty with it.
>
> Beauty, in the later Greek or Renaissance sense, is not the aim of my sculpture.
>
> Between beauty of expression and power of expression there is a difference of function. The first aims at pleasing the senses, the second has a spiritual vitality which for me is more moving and goes deeper than the senses.
>
> Because a work does not aim at reproducing natural appearances it is not, therefore, an escape from life—but may be a penetration into reality, not a sedative or drug, not just the exercise of good taste, the provision of pleasant shapes and colours in a pleasing combination, not a decoration to life, but an expression of the significance of life, a stimulation to a greater effort in living.

★

SITTING in this floating Mediterranean garden, at the point of Cap Ferrat, amid bougainvillaea and hibiscus, fir trees and cypresses, lemons and pomegranates, surrounded by a dazzling sea, I read the English newspapers like situation reports from some distant, confused yet vaguely menacing battlefield. Of course, this may be to take too dark a view of our present discontents. It may be that the strange New Deal inaugurated by the wage freeze will, as the Government promises, return Britain to the path of financial rectitude and in the long run, now only dimly to be foreseen, restore those hopes of economic growth which for a moment dazzled us so brightly and then withered almost overnight at their first contact with reality.

At least, this is what the Chancellor and others tell us; though precisely when and how this happy ending to our troubles is to come about has not yet been revealed. Yet whether or not the Government has interpreted the future correctly, what seems quite certain is that after this summer nothing will ever be quite the same again on the British political scene. Being myself an inveterate inspector of the political entrails which serve us as auguries of our future, I cannot help wondering, uneasily and against my will, whether what they foretell is not the approaching transformation of the Labour Party as we have hitherto known it.

This does not seem to me to depend on whether or not the Government is successful in its economic policies; indeed, in some ways it might be said that the more successful they were, the deeper the wounds they will inflict on the party. For they are based on premises which totally conflict with everything which the Labour Party has preached and propagated until so very recently, and though it has long been adept at adapting its theories to practice, it seems doubtful whether it can continue to surmount the glaring contradiction which now exists between its professions and its policies. Even the patient British electorate, one would imagine, cannot for long persevere in believing in a form of Socialism whose solution for economic difficulties is to increase unemployment.

Politics, however, do not depend on logic. They would be simple if they were, and we should not need Robert McKenzie to explain them to us. So it is possible that Socialism, and Socialists in Britain, will succeed in swallowing even the paradoxes with which Mr. Wilson has lately presented us. It may be more important that in recent months there have been changes

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in the balance of political power in Britain which must, one would imagine, eventually lead to the disruption of the Labour Party as we know it today.

FOR WHAT HAS OCCURRED has been a fundamental alteration in the relationship between the Labour government and the Trades Union movement; and since, in the past, the Trades Unions have been to the Labour Party what the Church of England combined with the brewers have been to the Conservatives, it would surely tax our credulity to the limit to believe that either the Labour Party or the Trades Unions can continue to go on behaving in the future as they have in the past. Freedom of collective bargaining has been as absolute a dogma both to the Labour Party and the Trades Unions as any of the Thirty-nine Articles ever were to the Church of England; far more absolute certainly than Clause Four ever was. Nothing could be more significant than that there should now be powerful elements in the Labour Party which, making virtues out of necessities, propose that the principles embodied in the wage freeze should become a permanent feature of our economy, as a means of applying Socialist planning to the deployment of our labour resources. From the point of view of traditional Socialist thinking in Britain, this is so atrocious a heresy that it is not surprising Mr. Stewart should hasten to reassure the Trades Unions that the government has not been contaminated by it. Yet only a few months ago, it would have been unthinkable that such a reassurance should ever have been required of a Socialist minister.

I am strengthened in these presentiments, or forebodings, of what the changes of this summer may mean for the future of the Labour Party by reading Mr. Trevor Wilson's recently published book *The Downfall of the Liberal Party* (Collins), in which he describes how, within twenty years of its immense electoral victory of 1906, the Liberal Party fell into ruins, never to recover as an effective political force. Among the factors Mr. Wilson enumerates as reasons for the party's decline and demise are the following: (1) that by entering the war, the Liberal government disavowed principles which had hitherto been regarded as fundamental to Liberal doctrine; (2) that in prosecuting the war, the Liberal government was forced to resort to measures which were in gross contradiction with everything in which the Liberal Party had hitherto professed to believe; (3) that such policies induced in the government's supporters a mood of disillusion, confusion, and apathy from which the party never recovered; (4) that the political decline of the Liberal Party was accompanied by a decline, throughout the country, of that form of radical nonconformity which had been the repository of the most sacred dogmas of the Liberal faith; (5) that, in the long term, one of the heaviest burdens the Liberal Party had to carry was a statesman of outstanding political genius whose methods of government were, however, so devious that he finally antagonised almost everyone, within and outside his own party, with whom he had any political dealings.

ONE WOULD NOT necessarily say that all of these kinds of factors were at work in the Labour Party today, and historical analogies are, in any case, as often misleading as not, largely because we tend to read into the past precisely those features which seem to us important and significant in the present. Yet it seems to me that there are sufficient parallels between the condition of the Liberal Party after 1914 and that of the Labour Party after this summer to illuminate, if not to confirm, the slightly alarming conclusions one feels inclined to draw from the present political situation.

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POETRY

MacNeice as Critic

By John Wain

LOUIS MACNEICE, like most poets, was a good critic, and his criticism seems to me to have been unjustly neglected. His early book *Modern Poetry: a Personal Essay* is unobtainable, while many far more dated and trivial books are re-issued in paperback; his *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1941) is also unreprinted at a time when inert academic books on that poet are distributed by the hundredweight. And when his *Varieties of Parable*[1] appeared last autumn, reviewers—the ones I saw, at any rate—seemed curiously unwilling to take it seriously, as the considered and wide-ranging utterance of an important English poet. It came out at the same time as the posthumous autobiography, *The Strings Are False*,[2] and the reviews concentrated on the autobiography and bundled *Varieties of Parable* into a perfunctory last paragraph. I have even heard it dismissed as "just reprinted lectures," as if some of the most important English criticism, from Coleridge through Arnold to Eliot, were not reprinted lectures.

Perhaps MacNeice's modesty of tone is against him; many reviewers think that a critic who hasn't a portentous tone must have nothing to say, and Cambridge, where *Varieties of Parable* was given as the Clark Lectures, is the home of a certain critical cant, a tone at once bullying and pious, from which again MacNeice is entirely free. I should like here to set *Varieties of Parable* in perspective against MacNeice's other critical writings and to show the development of that view of experience, and therefore of literature, which underlay his work in all fields.

A convenient starting-point is the essay, "Subject in Modern Poetry," which MacNeice contributed to *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* for 1936. This was the crest of his first wave as a poet; his early volume *Blind Fireworks* (1929) had been forgotten and forgiven, and the very substantial and enduring *Poems* (1935) were there to give weight to any pronouncement about poetry that he cared to make. The gist of the essay is that after a period in the wilderness of aestheticism, art for art's sake and "significant form," modern poetry has recovered a healthy interest in subject-matter; that it matters intensely what a poem is "about," and that on the whole the newer generation of poets (MacNeice mentions Auden and Spender a good deal while keeping himself modestly in the background, but we are given to understand that he is in there with A. and S.) are good because they engage directly with life as it is lived in their time. MacNeice is too perceptive not to see that Yeats and Eliot are major poets, but he is wary of them; he has not yet come to terms which would allow a fruitful relationship to develop.

> Mr. Yeats, like Mr. Eliot, is not a poet to imitate. He has gone too roundabout to his end. Auden writes in an essay on "Psychology and Art": "There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love." Speaking very approximately I would say that the difference between Yeats and Eliot on the one hand and Auden and Spender on the other is that escape-art predominates in Yeats and Eliot while parable-art predominates in Auden and Spender, though these two latter are of course themselves escaping at the same time as they are preaching parables.

This is "speaking very approximately" with a vengeance; what the youthful MacNeice is revealing is simply that he hasn't yet worked round to a position from which he can see that an art which doesn't use journalistic methods is still able to address itself to real problems. In the same essay he says, "Every man lives in a contemporary context which is of value and

[1] Cambridge University Press, 22s. 6d.
[2] Faber & Faber, 30s.

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interest. That is the life which, directly or indirectly, he should write about."

A CERTAIN UNEASINESS is indicated by the escape-clause "directly or indirectly," since of course writing "indirectly" about one's "contemporary context" is what any poet could claim to be doing, and it is evident that this early, tough-minded manifesto indicates a position that MacNeice occupied only temporarily; there is a superficiality about it that was not characteristic of his mind. When he handled the same theme two years later in the much more considered *Modern Poetry: a Personal Essay*, he makes the points about contemporary realism much more cautiously, and is also, very interestingly, beginning to skirmish with the problem of how to give full recognition to the greatness of Yeats without ceasing to be a modern young man of the 'thirties. One thing, however, remains firm: the dismissal of any theory of art which tries to elevate form over matter. The idea, derived more or less sloppily from European Symbolism, that it doesn't matter what a poem is about, and that a poet is engaged in ladling out a pure essence which transforms all it touches and therefore needn't really touch anything, arouses his brisk contempt.

> When a poet becomes preoccupied with looking for the essentials of poetry he is lost. Good poets have written in order to describe something or to preach something—with their eye on the object or the end. The essence of the poetry does not lie in the thing described or in the message imparted but in the resulting concrete unity, the poem. But no one can set out to write poetry by merely attempting to bottle the essence of it—just as no one can win a race by standing, to start with, at the tape.

Louis MacNeice never wavered from this attitude, a fact duly noted by his old friend W. H. Auden, who in his recently published elegy on MacNeice (in *About the House*) writes:

> *I should like to become, if possible,*
> *a minor atlantic Goethe,*
> *with his passion for weather and stones but without his silliness*
> *re the Cross: at times a bore, but,*
> *while knowing Speech can at best, a shadow echoing*
> *the silent light, bear witness*
> *to the Truth it is not, he wished it were, as the Francophile*
> *gaggle of pure songsters*
> *are too vain to. We're not musicians: to stink of Poetry*
> *is unbecoming, and never*
> *to be dull shows a lack of taste.*

This is good epistolary poetry (whether or not it is a good elegy) because it gives solid ground for the shared taste of poet and subject; Louis MacNeice had put a great deal of effort into translating Goethe, and his criticism relentlessly contradicted the "Francophile gaggle of pure songsters" who disdained "subject-matter." MacNeice, any more than Auden, never "stank of Poetry."

TO RETRACE our steps for a moment, the *penchant* for a surface "realism" characterises Louis MacNeice's poetry up to and including *Autumn Journal* (1939) and his criticism up to and including *Modern Poetry*. The work of these years is stylish and memorable. But all the time a deeper layer was waiting to be explored. Most artists, in their earlier phases, neglect sources of strength within themselves because their intellectual framework is too small and tight to allow them to reach down and tap these sources. In *The Strings Are False* MacNeice recalls (p. 77) a glorious summer when he and his friends, at prep school, got excited about Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*: "On Sundays we rode about the country on branches of trees, each with an ashplant for a sword, and tried to use the Malory diction." And he adds, significantly:

> It was my last open make-believe before my adolescence, after which time, like everyone else, I lived half the time in fantasy, but craftily, deceiving both others and myself. This adult make-believe is something we have foolishly ignored. Teddy Bock is always with us, and in the epoch of Hitler—Siegfried Redivivus—it is not only a mistake but a disaster to ignore those underground motives which cause both art and war.

This was written in about 1940, and the date is important because the beginning of World War II was obviously for MacNeice a period of tremendous break-through. For ten years he had, with not many reservations, followed the Auden directives, and now suddenly the jig was up. With the other clever and energetic young poets, he had written poems full of realism and up-to-dateness, closing them firmly against anything old-fashioned and dreamy but opening them to anything that concerned the way the world was actually run or actually thought about, to economics and psychology and industry. I don't want to be too naïve about this; the work collected in *Poems* contains no simple-minded acceptance of the shibboleths of modernity and *Realpolitik*. On the contrary, it is full of resistance to the shallow, excited theorising of that decade and it is also full of an elegiac resignation, a feeling that the

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machines are taking over and that everything human will soon go down; he continually speaks with disdain and dislike of the

Shuddering insidious shock of the theory-vendors,
The little sardine men crammed in a monster toy
Who tilt their aggregate beast against our crumbling Troy.

And again:

The town-dweller like a rabbit in a green-grocer's
Who was innocent and integral once
Now, red with slit guts, hangs by the heels
Hangs by the heels gut-open against the fog
Between two spires that are not conscious of him.

Certainly he made his protest against the spiritual blindness and dryness of that decade, and also its sheer foolishness ("Naomi Mitchison after a fortnight or so in Russia gave a lecture at Birmingham University about the joy in the faces of the masses. It all seemed to me too pat."). But his poems, though in many things they resisted their age, always wore its dress; he made his protest but he was careful to make it in an idiom not too far removed from the lingo of the "little sardine men"; he might be describing a desperate and doomed struggle but he would never, at this stage, have expressed it in a symbolic image like Yeats'.

Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea.

WHEN THE LIBERATION CAME, it came at least partly through Yeats himself. At all events, one of the first fruits of the new and richer phase of MacNeice's mental life was his book *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1941). Yeats, by turning his back on everything scientific and progressive, by rejecting the cosmopolitanism of modern art and immersing himself in the problems of a small country, had fairly consistently flouted all the assumptions on which MacNeice and his friends had been proceeding, yet here was MacNeice writing a sensitive and informed study of him. Naturally we turn to the Yeats book to see if the author gives any clue to his changed attitude, and sure enough on the very first page we have this virtually important statement:

> I had only written a little of his book when Germany invaded Poland. On that day I was in Galway. As soon as I heard on the wireless of the outbreak of war, Galway became unreal. And Yeats and his poetry became unreal also.
>
> This was not merely because Galway and Yeats belong in a sense to a past order of things. The unreality which now overtook them was also overtaking in my mind modern London, modernist art, and Left-wing politics. If the war made nonsense of Yeats' poetry and of all works that are called "escapist," it also made nonsense of the poetry that professes to be "realist." My friends had been writing for years about guns and frontiers and factories, about the "facts" of psychology, politics, science, economics, but the fact of war made their writing seem as remote as the pleasure dome in Xanadu. For war spares neither the poetry of Xanadu nor the poetry of pylons. I gradually inferred, as I recovered from the shock of war, that both these kinds of poetry stand or fall together. War does not prove that one is better or worse than the other; it attempts to disprove both. But poetry must not be disproved. If war is the test of reality, then all poetry is unreal; but in that case unreality is a virtue.

The way was now open. The keen-eyed, alert poet who captured the shifting scene, the poet as journalist and commentator, was not necessarily disowned, but from now on he worked as part of a team. The deeper levels of symbolism were acknowledged; the lifelong interest in myth, in folktale, in the marvellous and the archetypal, was released from concealment. And MacNeice went on to give his own definition, not of poetry (he was too intelligent for that) but of the poet. It is embodied in the following quotation, which, though by its length it tempts the reader to skip, will be read by anyone with a serious interest in Louis MacNeice's mind and art.

> In previous writings about poetry I have offended certain readers because I have grouped the poet with ordinary men and opposed him to the mystic proper. I do not withdraw from this position. I think that human activity begins at a stage below thought with an urge which I can only describe as mystical; at this stage the individual does not distinguish the forces within him from the forces outside him; he does not know what he is driving at and he is not, I suspect, even properly conscious that it is *he* who is driving at it. The stage of thought, on the other hand, is a stage of distinctions and of consciousness of the ego. The mystic proper transcends these distinctions and once more merges the ego in the cosmos. Ordinary civilised men live most of their lives in the intermediate stage —the stage of distinctions and egoism. The poet is found among them because the poet's job is to be articulate and man cannot be articulate unless he makes distinctions; the logical outcome of mysticism is silence. On the other hand the poet shares the paradoxical position of the ordinary man. The paradox is this: man lives by egoism, by making distinctions, but he derives his driving force from a stage below distinctions and he derives his ideals from a stage above them. The ordinary man, that is, has his sub-self of animal and his super-self of mystic proper.... The poet is not necessarily either more animal or more mystical than the ordinary man, though he may be either, as he may also be more rational.

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In case anyone is puzzled by MacNeice's use of the not very helpful word "mystical" to describe the pre-conscious energies which drive humanity, I give here the immediately preceding passage, which resolves this difficulty; the reader need not trouble about it unless the difficulty bothers him.

> People often speak as if the sole motive for all actions whether of animals or human beings were the wish to go on living. This is an inadequate explanation and not even a truly utilitarian one. One has merely to ask "*Why* should they wish to go on living?" and one introduces a question of value which has nothing to do with utility; food may be useful because it keeps you alive but what is life useful for? The answer is that, if life is desirable, it is not desirable because it is useful but because it is good in itself. But, if this is so, it cannot be regarded as a mere ideal terminus governing the various activities of living but itself beyond them; these activities *are* life. This being so, all these activities themselves involve the question of value. It would be absurd to contend that either animals or human beings do all they do because that is the best way of keeping alive. Life for living creatures is not something which you merely have or have not; it is something plastic; it *is* what you make it. The sense of values governing this conscious or unconscious creation of life (presumably unconscious among the lower animals, partly conscious among human beings) is not utilitarian; it can only be described as mystical.

I don't know how widely this tripartite view of man would nowadays be accepted—that he "lives by egoism, by making distinctions, but he derives his driving force from a stage below distinctions and he derives his ideals from a stage above them." Probably many people today would leave out the part about ideals coming from "above" the life of distinctions and self-consciousness. MacNeice, the son of a bishop (and not just any old bishop but one who seems to have practised pretty successfully what he preached) always retained some colouring from an unambiguously Christian upbringing; intellectually he became a sceptic, but something had gone to the roots and it would not have seemed strange to him to speak naturally of idealism instead of deriving everything, as most people seem to do today, simply from the appetites.

Still, whether accepted or not, the view of the poet as being in a position shared with "ordinary civilised men" is crucial in MacNeice's thinking. Naturally one of the things it connects with is his sense, both as poet and as critic, that literature makes its statements in this triple way: and not only "literature" but everything in narrative or verbal form that has power to hold our attention. A fairy story, for instance, reaches down "where all the ladders start," and at the same time most fairy stories contain a fairly overt moral, or at least a strongly held set of values, that corresponds to MacNeice's "idealism."

AFTER the Yeats book, our next landmark is the "Introductory Note" to *The Dark Tower* (broadcast 1946, printed the following year). This note begins as follows:

> *The Dark Tower* is a parable play, belonging to that wide class of writings which includes *Everyman, The Faerie Queene* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Though under the name of allegory this kind of writing is sometimes dismissed as outmoded, the clothed as distinct from the naked allegory is in fact very much alive. Obvious examples are *Peer Gynt* and the stories of Kafka but also in such books as *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, where the disguise of "realism" is maintained and nothing happens that is quite inconceivable in life, it is still the symbolic core which makes the work important. My own impression is that pure "realism" is in our time almost played out, though most works of fiction of course will remain realistic *on the surface*. The single-track mind and the single-plane novel or play are almost bound to falsify the world in which we live. The fact that there is method in madness and the fact that there is fact in fantasy (and equally fantasy in "fact") have been brought home to us not only by Freud and other psychologists but by events themselves. This being so, reportage can no longer masquerade as art. So the novelist, abandoning the "straight" method of photography, is likely to resort once more not only to the twist of plot but to all kinds of other twists which may help him to do justice to the world's complexity. Some element of parable, therefore, far from making a work thinner and more abstract, ought to make it more concrete. Man does after all live by symbols.

To "do justice to the world's complexity"; this had become, as it must in every writer's life, the most important objective. As a poet and a man, MacNeice had always been keenly responsive to "the drunkenness of things being various," as he calls it in "Snow":

> *World is crazier and more of it than we think,*
> *Incorrigibly plural.*

What is interesting about the passage I have just quoted is the way it sounds the keynote of *Varieties of Parable*; all the major preoccupations are there in that one paragraph, including the way he is prepared to prescribe for the novel as well as poetry and drama. Between the writing of this Introduction and the delivery of the Clark Lectures in 1964, a whole generation of writers appeared and confirmed MacNeice's prediction. Imagine contemporary literature

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without Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Golding, Hughes, and you will see what I mean.[3]

Another point that catches one's attention in the *Dark Tower* introduction is the use, right at the beginning, of the word "parable." Had this stuck in MacNeice's mind from that passage from Auden's essay which he had quoted a decade before in "Subject in Modern Poetry"? If so, the term was to lodge there permanently. The opening pages of *Varieties of Parable* are devoted to explaining that while the author is not satisfied with the term "parable" the other available terms, "symbolism" and "allegory," seem to him worse still. So "parable" it is to be, and perhaps the youthful Auden's definition still clung about the word, "that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love," since this in the last analysis is what all art does.

THE AUTHORS mainly treated in *Varieties of Parable* are Spenser, Bunyan, George MacDonald, Kafka, Beckett, Golding, and Pinter, though there are illuminating asides on many others, notably George Herbert, Shelley, Charles Kingsley, and Ionesco. The choice of authors to be spotlighted seems more or less random, but in a healthy way; any critic with a well-stocked mind, in talking about a number of authors he enjoys, will always make us feel that he might as easily have chosen an equal number of others. MacNeice avoids the temptation to be schematic, the appearance of claiming that the men he chooses are the only ones who could be tied up in that particular bundle. Another temptation, in a critical argument that ranges over a wide span of time, is to make historical juxtapositions too easily. Literary history, like any history, can be chopped up and fitted together again in any shape that pleases us, if we are willing to be surgical enough; but it is a living tissue and cannot stand too much cutting about. The earliest writers on MacNeice's list, Spenser and Bunyan, could be fitted (with neat artificial joints) flush with the latest ones, but he is too honest to make that kind of simplifying connection. The early Eliot, in the interests of polemic and a refreshing new perspective, could declare sweepingly that the true tradition of English poetry had been lost in the later 17th century, and that modern poets had discovered the way back to it, so that their verse joined directly on to Donne's; as time went on, Eliot himself saw clearly the weaknesses of this position, which is to some extent characteristic of a highly cultivated young mardarin newly arrived in Europe, rather than of someone who had rubbed up against the grain of English life and absorbed its literature in the process. MacNeice has a characteristically honest passage:

> I should have liked to entitle this book "From Spenser to Beckett"; on the surface it would have seemed feasible to jump right on from the mid-17th century to the mid-19th or even the late 19th. But I felt I could not do this. By bringing in a poet like Shelley I run the risk of clouding the issue, of cramming too many dissimilar kinds of writing into an inadequate receptacle or, if you prefer, of hopelessly mixing my drinks. But to leave him out in this context would be, I think, dishonest; it would be like suppressing a bend sinister in one's family tree, an extremely important bend sinister. For, whether we like it or not, an English writer of the 20th century must have much more of Shelley in him than of Spenser, say, or Herbert or Bunyan. Mr. Eliot's famous lament about the dissociation of sensibility at the end of the 17th century got a sympathetic hearing in this country, but with the best will in the world the sympathetic hearers could not put their own sensibilities together again. Certainly between the two world wars younger poets turned back to the Metaphysicals and imitated something of their technique, but such imitations were of the surface. Over the gulf that lies between us no one can imitate an attitude. As for Mr. Eliot himself, whatever his preaching, in his practice he could not escape his heritage—or recover his lost heritage. In spite of himself his poetry fails to be impersonal—and it is not classical either. "Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?" *The Waste Land* is nearer in feeling to Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* than it is to anything before the French Revolution or the Industrial Revolution.

It is this honesty that compelled MacNeice to put in a chapter on the 19th-century Romantics, which spoilt the neat shape of the book but did so in a good cause, making it less pat, less schematic, than a tidier study would have been. He was also careful to distinguish between "drifting" and "anchored" allegory. His earlier examples, in the 16th and 17th centuries, stand in a definite relationship to a body of beliefs about the universe, common to more or less the whole population; his modern examples are floating on a sea of imponderables, from which an individual angler might pull out a definite belief here and there; even Golding, who appears to have specific Christian beliefs and to work them out specifically in his stories, cannot take Christianity for granted as Bunyan could and did.

This, of course, brings up the notorious "problem of belief," and here again MacNeice

[3] Some of those writers had started work before 1947, but none of them had done the work that brought recognition; neither Beckett nor Ionesco had arrived in the public consciousness when MacNeice made his prediction, and *Lord of the Flies* was still eight years in the future.

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is honest and helpful. After touching on the great test-case of Dante, whom everyone admits to be a great poet though most of his readers now dissent from his concrete message, he says:

> I shall not discuss Dante, but in the next chapter I shall be discussing two great writers, the first of whom, Spenser, though not particularly either mystical or propagandist, remained essentially Christian both in his ethics and in his cosmology, and the second of whom, Bunyan, was essentially an evangelical writer, whose interests, unlike Spenser's, were entirely bound up with his creed. Now with English readers, I have noticed, their reactions to Bunyan are often quite different from their professed reactions to Dante. Faced with the spokesman of Thomist Catholicism they are very ready to say that his beliefs are irrelevant and that they can enjoy his poetry with the next man. But faced with the spokesman of the English Puritan Revolution they shy away in horror and say they just cannot stomach a writer who held such beliefs: this time it is not the beliefs but the beauty of the writing that is irrelevant. I suggest that the reason for this is that Bunyan is too near to us. Whatever his religion or lack of religion, every Englishman has to some degree inherited the Puritan Revolution just as he has inherited the Industrial Revolution. Therefore he can understand Bunyan much more easily than he can Dante and that is just what frightens him. For, if Bunyan's beliefs are not his, Bunyan's *experience* to some degree must be.

MacNeice's own guiding principle seems to have been that getting to know a work of literature is like getting to know a person: one has always to think, "If I had had his experience, I might have been like him." This attitude, which is about equally far removed from any of the dominant schools of criticism today—witch-hunting, laboratory or flippant-epigrammatic—means that he has the patience and toleration to get what is valuable out of writing that is admittedly far from being perfect. Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, for instance, is approached as part of the Victorian experience and a humane, tolerant interest in that experience is assumed to be part of the equipment we will take along with us.

> *Water Babies* is a grotesquely uneven book but its unevenness is an essential part of it. Kingsley had a marvellous central idea—Jungians could well call it archetypal—but I doubt if he would have got it launched if it had not been for his peculiar blend of muscular Christianity, jingoism, a passion for natural history and a kind of half-mystical, half-sentimental pantheism. For the last-named quality, it would illustrate the recurrence of ideas in very different kinds of parable writing to compare—and contrast—Kingsley's Mother Carey "making things make themselves" with Spenser's "Old Genius" in the Garden of Adonis:
>
> *A thousand thousand naked babes attend*
> *About him day and night, which doe require*
> *That he with fleshly weedes would them attire...*
>
> My point here, however, is to stress that you should not approach a work like *Water Babies* as if it had come into being in a vacuum: like most of the more interesting so-called "children's books" it is essentially adult, and an awareness of Victorian conflicts and, at the least, a suspension of antipathy towards its author's attitude will give weight to what otherwise might be written off as whimsical.

If this kind of civilised attitude to literature were to become dominant, such hatchet-jobs as the frenzied attack on *Tom Brown's Schooldays* recently printed in these pages would be seen for what they are and not mistaken for criticism.

TOLERANCE, decency, acuteness, the honest facing of difficulties: these are the marks of MacNeice's criticism, and when they are added to his initial advantages—a good education (particularly a first-hand acquaintance with Greek and Latin) and the imagination of a practitioner—the result is criticism which has few equals in our time. One other quality should be added: the courage to tackle a large general subject. The theme of *Varieties of Parable* is nothing less than the basic question, "How does literature make its statements? Why are they not the same as the statements of science or history?" By discussing a line of writers who either ignore surface realism or, as in Bunyan, employ surface realism but wed it to a subject-matter avowedly emblematic, MacNeice was evidently concerned to open the reader's mind to the great things that are possible to a literary art which has cast off "realism" in the old hampering sense. Indeed, a recurring fault in the book is that "realism" is used too exclusively as a term of disapprobation. There were genuine and important reasons why, during the first phase of industrial society from, say, 1830 to 1914, the arts should have been preoccupied with the attempt to catalogue and describe and comprehend this terrifying new world, and realism, with or without the capital *R* and the ballyhoo, was a new and effective instrument. In his urge to liberate the writer from an outworn realism, MacNeice falls into the attitude that all realism is hampering and seems to think it was never anything but a blind alley. Thus he speaks of "the average naturalistic novel whose roots go little deeper than a gossip column"—and how deep is that? Later: "In the 20th century, it seems to me, realism in the photographic sense is almost played out and no longer satisfies our needs."

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Fair enough, but we need some recognition that our needs were once different and that realism did, for a time, satisfy them—writers like Flaubert and Arnold Bennett weren't just triflers. In the 19th century, he remarks elsewhere, "the novels for the time being had pretty well sold out to realism." Not until page 102 does he bring this hostility to "realism" fully into the open:

> . . . if it is true that the wheel of creative writing has moved round, though far from full circle, to a position more like that of Spenser, one of the reasons surely must be the growing dissatisfaction that many people feel with the sort of "realistic" writing that is primarily concerned with man as seen in a supposedly objective way, in the conventional double framework of a recognisable external nature and some well-established human society: what E. M. Forster called "the world of telegrams and anger." Such literary realism rested upon wider optimistic assumptions, both about science and about human society, that had been made by most educated people since the early days of the Enlightenment till, say, the First World War.

This is true, of course, but one can't simply say, "When certain assumptions about man and society were taken for granted, people wrote realistic works, nowadays they will write parables," because that makes the distinction too hard and fast. I don't know what a fully "realistic" work would be, but it certainly would not be a work of the imagination, because one of the invariable functions of the imagination is to invest scenes and people with a large, reverberative significance. *Dr. Zhivago* covers a wide sweep of contemporary history and contains large-scale descriptive murals that remind us of Tolstoy, but is it "realistic"? And can we unhesitatingly say of *War and Peace* that it contains nothing "symbolic," no parable?

As we might expect, MacNeice has seen this difficulty and, at whatever expense to the neatness of his exposition, turns to face it.

> In answer to the question "Can you think of any literary work that is not in some sense a parable?" one has to recognise that nearly all "Realistic" fiction must be so, in however slight a sense. It is not just that anyone with ingenuity can read almost any sort of allegorical significance into anything (the ancients excelled in doing this both with Homer and with the Bible). That may be a very good parlour game but, so far as art is concerned, it is a perversion. There are, however, two reasons why all fiction is to some extent parabolical. One is the extremely artificial nature of language which, from the start, prevents a writer becoming a camera. The other is the simple fact that, when a novelist invents a character or situation or occurrence, these, if they are recognised at all by the reader as having anything to do with his own experience (and I take "experience" here to include potential experience), will at once acquire a wider reference. They will stand for something not themselves; in other words, they will be symbols. So the difference between "realistic writing" and "parable writing" appears to be one of degree. But the difference in degree can be so vast that, as in many other spheres, it is convenient to use a rule of thumb and treat a really noticeable difference in degree as constituting a difference in kind. It is on this basis that I have tried to limit the subject-matter of the present book.

Such a pragmatic position, free of any temptation to build cages of theory, aware always that (as Cocteau put it) "the artist is a prison from which works of art escape," takes us back to MacNeice's formulation of twenty years earlier, about the poet who "shares the paradoxical position of the ordinary man." The willingness to be pragmatic, to live from situation to situation without striving to bring everything under one cut-and-dried system, and at the same time to see paradox and anomaly where they *are* present—this is the very opposite of "muddling through": it calls for clear-sighted humility.

I PROPOSE, THEN, to reverse the judgment implied by most reviewers of these two last MacNeice books. *The Strings Are False,* though beautifully written, is minor MacNeice; most of it is anticipated either in the poems or in the interesting "Case-Book" chapters of *Modern Poetry*. It is *Varieties of Parable* we should read carefully; for all its modesty it makes many important observations, some of which had waited twenty years to get on to paper, and good criticism is not so common that we can leave it to gather dust.

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Frantz Fanon

A Gospel for the Damned — By ARISTIDE R. ZOLBERG

THE PROBLEMS of independence in Africa have generated a new literature of philosophy, ideology, and theory which reflects, beneath a certain amount of cant, a serious appreciation of the solemnity of political foundings. Beyond its appeal for a specialised audience, the political drama that is being enacted also offers a bonus to the amateur of repertory revival. In spite of many efforts to devise original formulations, African political thought continues to be cast in moulds designed in Europe. Committed to a democratic legitimacy but persuaded that they alone are qualified to rule, many of Africa's insecure oligarchs have been putting forward theories that stress "the general will" as expressed through the rulers of a "monolithic party." The exceptions to this Jacobin trend and the reactions it has engendered also have an uncanny familiar sound. The struggle of the opposition in Ghana bore a striking resemblance to that of the *Fédérés*; the Nigerians speak the language of Burke or of Madison; and Houphouet-Boigny's régime, based on government rather than on party and intent on creating an indigenous bourgeoisie, might well be summed up in another echo: *Enrichissez-vous*....

Will the high tide of political messianism which arose in Europe after the abortive first classic revolution also engulf Africa? Religious movements with political overtones have been endemic to many parts of the continent. Where de-colonisation was relatively easy and rapid, however, such movements tended to be submerged by Congress-type organisations led by educated men who had little cause for despair and among whom the utopian spirit was seldom manifest. More recently, however, it has become obvious that the usual nationalist strategies are of little use in areas where intractable white minorities refuse to negotiate. Furthermore, in the new states themselves, many Africans have begun to agree with the observers who say that the continent is off to a bad start. Independence has fostered great expectations, an acute awareness of the immense obstacles that prevent their fulfilment, and a growing impatience with the incumbent rulers who have a limited understanding of what is to be done. Few among the opposition wish for a Restoration. But many believe that the "new class" and the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" are fundamentally corrupt. The true revolution—the revolution that will constitute a new beginning—is yet to come.

ITS PROPHET has already appeared. Like his European predecessors, Frantz Fanon has conjured up a Manichean world in which the colonised, a world-wide proletariat, are the damned. His gospel, *Les Damnés de la Terre*, was written during the last year of his brief life and published about a month before he died of leukemia in October, 1961, at the age of thirty-six.[1] It is the last act of a decade of public life during which its author joined to the life of the physician-scholar that of the political militant; to a love of French culture hatred of French colonial policy; to a belief in universal values the aspirations of colonial nationalists; to the world of the coloniser the world of the colonised. Born in Martinique as a French citizen, he had become Algerian by choice and was serving the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic as its ambassador in Accra when his health began to falter in mid-1960. The last year of his life appears like a desperate attempt to span the world: to Tunis to rest; to the U.S.S.R. in the vain hope of effective medical care; to Rome, for a last encounter with the

[1] Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Paris). François Maspero, 1961: "Cahiers Libres," Nos. 27–28. An English edition, *The Damned*, was published by Présence Africaine (Paris, 1964). The same text has appeared in the United States and Britain as *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press; London: MacGibbon & Kee.

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world of the left-bank now closed to him; and finally to a last hospital in Washington, D.C., where, as he lay dying, he thought himself, like Lumumba, at the mercy of his murderous enemies.[2] His grave in Algeria was his first resting-place since his departure from the Antilles at the end of World War II.

FRANTZ FANON was a Negro and a psychiatrist. These are essential facts in the career of the political thinker which began with the publication in 1952 of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs,* in the Editions du Seuil. Before World War II, educated Martiniquais knew no culture other than that of France, no identity other than a French identity. Like a European child who discovered in the midst of Nazi persecutions that he was a Jew, Fanon, the dark-skinned Frenchman, discovered that he was a "Nigger" when the delicate balance of Martinique was upset by the sudden influx of 10,000 refugee French sailors during World War II. Blackness pursued him when, as a youth, he joined the First French Army towards the end of the war, and afterwards, while he studied medicine in Lyons. This unresolved crisis of identity in himself and others was the obsession that propelled his thought. What started out as a medical thesis on the relevance of classical psychoanalysis to the psycho-pathology of the Negro in a white world became his first book.

The psycho-analytic materials scattered through Fanon's work are often commonplace and simplistic; reports of therapy with which he closes *Les Damnés* are as improbable as miraculous; and there is no evidence as to whether he had many cures to his credit. But from the very beginning he displayed a brilliant knack for transforming clinical insights into political poetry designed to achieve his fundamental purpose. In an early article discussing North African patients in a French hospital, he pointed out that there is a "North African syndrome" of which individual illnesses are but a manifestation; the solution must therefore be sought in the social situation internalised by individuals.[3] Similarly he reasoned that neuroses exist among West Indians even where there is no evidence of personal trauma; hence they must stem from the status of the entire group. Fanon therefore undertook to invent the collective therapy required to save a race.

Using materials familiar to readers of the American psycho-analytic sociology of race-relations of just before the second World War —but which he seems to have known only through its literary expression in Richard Wright and others—he sought to demonstrate in *Peau Noire* that Negrophobia arises from the sexual repression Europeans underwent in the process of striving for high achievement. Blackness comes to be identified with dangerous instincts, with sin, with evil. As such it finds its place in the collective unconscious—not of "man," as Fanon argues in a sally against Jung —but of "the European." In fundamental contrast, the black man, personified by the French-speaking West Indian, has no Oedipus complex. Sexual deviations of any sort are unknown to him (transvestites, whom Fanon has observed in Martinique, are dismissed by him as playful masqueraders). The psychic tragedy of the Negro is that he has assimilated the European collective unconscious along with a European language and culture. Sartre's dialectical dictum provides Fanon with a major lead: as the anti-Semite creates the Jew, so the Negrophobe creates the Nigger. Now, wherever he may be, whatever else he may be, the Nigger is not a man, he is a black man, who fears and hates his blackness.

THERE FOLLOWS a desperate search for escape, but all paths lead to dead-ends. The Nigger wishes to disappear, but can do so only in his dreams. He learns to speak French and fancies himself becoming whiter, more of a man. But this white mask is a false *persona*, incompatible with reality. The more he tries to become a European, the more he is made aware of his blackness. If he becomes a doctor, his patients will say "We have a Negro doctor: his hands are very gentle." If he becomes a professor, the students will whisper, "We have a Negro professor, he is very intelligent." Finally, to the white in love with whiteness, the Nigger attempts to oppose his own narcissism. Like many other French-speaking intellectuals, Fanon had followed the lead of his countryman, the poet Aimé Césaire, into a contemplation of "the glorious humility of a race that had never accomplished anything. . . ." The word had become flesh through the founding of *Présence Africaine* in Paris in 1947. But the following year, in a preface to Léopold Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, Sartre raised this Black Orpheus only to subject him to a cruel indictment: his *négritude* is an "anti-racist racism," which can be but a "negative moment" that reinforces the fundamental division of the world and must bow to inexorable dialectical progress. Fanon raged at his fiendish master but

[2] The circumstances of his death and several conversations are related by Simone de Beauvoir in *La Force des Choses* (1963).

[3] *Pour la Révolution Africaine* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1964; "Cahiers Libres," Nos. 53–54). The essay appeared originally in *Esprit*, 1952.

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submitted to his logic. He concludes that the only hope for effective cure lies in commitment, in the existentialist praxis. The black man will not be a man until he is recognised as a man by other men; he will remain enslaved until he has successfully struggled for his political freedom.

The solution itself is hardly original. What distinguishes Fanon, however, is that he believed that the black masses needed a myth without which, as Sorel said in his *Reflections on Violence,* "one may go on talking revolt indefinitely without ever provoking any revolutionary movement." Although he does not yet provide it in *Peau Noire*, the accents of utopia are already present. In his account of the psychodynamics of colonisation, he implies that at the beginning there was a state of psychic peace. But this was violated by the Europeans, who are themselves the victims of history. In the end, however, the Manichean world will be a community once again; the state of innocence will be reinstated. It is the elaboration of this myth which provides the main theme for the decade that followed.

A YEAR AFTER the publication of his book, Fanon was in Algeria where as a French physician, albeit black, his status was superior to that of North African Muslims, in whose eyes he was an inferior man of the Sudan. Within a year of his arrival, the Algerian rising had begun. As head of the psychiatric service of the administrative hospital of Blida-Joinville, Fanon led a double life for nearly two years. He cared for French victims of Algerian terror and trained Muslim saboteurs. He comforted a policeman exhausted from a demanding daily routine which included questioning Algerians under torture, but also pieced together victims of his patient's zeal. In 1956, the man who had stated that writing was for him a form of meditation, a prelude to action, made his choice: with a letter to the Minister-Resident baring the struggle of his soul, he resigned his post and prepared to join the revolution.

The experiences of these years were fundamental. Confronted with the Algerian situation, Fanon altered his vision: he no longer saw a world divided into Black and White, but into Coloniser and Colonised. In an address on "Racism and Culture" which he delivered before the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists (held in Paris in September, 1956), he argued that racism is not an independent phenomenon but rather "the most visible element" of a total hierarchical relationship established by a group endowed with a technical advantage over another. In order to consolidate their hold, the colonisers must destroy the cultural system of the colonised. Deprived of their values, the latter become manipulatable objects which can then be assimilated into the new order; what was a life-giving indigenous culture becomes a mummy which imprisons the colonised in a stultified traditionalism; apathy, inertia, an inferiority complex, guilt, follow. Racism must therefore not be viewed as something innate in man or as a "psychological flaw," but as a necessary ideological weapon which accompanies domination. Even if, like France, it prides itself on universalism, a colonial country *must* be racist. Nevertheless, since such a weapon must be flexible in order to retain its effectiveness, it undergoes many metamorphoses. Having been forced to abandon a more primitive version based on biological attributes, the dominant group invents a new ethnocentric hierarchy of ways of life; when this too comes under fire, racism is treated as an unfortunate aberration and a committee of the United Nations is formed to eradicate it. But Fanon warns against this new economism: "the superstructure of exploitation" will disappear only through a struggle for political liberation.

It is in relation to the nature of this struggle that Fanon's thought underwent a second transformation during these Algerian years. The sensitive man, the healer, recoiled from the horrors of war, and particularly from the mental breakdowns it caused on both sides; but the ideologue was mesmerised by the creative power of revolution, by the purifying flame of violence. After a brief trip to France he rejoined the Algerian leadership in Tunis and undertook two assignments which involved these two selves: the healer worked in the Algerian army's field hospitals, while the ideologue became an editorial writer for *El Moujahid*, central organ of the FLN. Fanon's vision grew more precise, and he affirmed in the concluding sentence of his second book the myth that was to save the colonised:

> The Revolution in depth, the true revolution because it transforms man and renews society, is very advanced. This oxygen which invents and organises a new humanity, it is that also, the Algerian Revolution.[4]

In the orgy of self-hatred that serves as a preface to *Les Damnés*, Sartre states that Fanon, "if you neglect the fascistic chatter of Sorel, is the first since Engels to have turned the spotlight on the midwife of history." But *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne* is inconceivable without Sorel—although I do not believe that

[4] *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1959; "Cahiers Libres," No. 3).

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Fanon ever refers to this predecessor in any of his works. Most of the book is devoted to a demonstration of the therapeutic effects of participation in the revolution on man and society. In an extraordinary analysis of the symbol of the Veil, Fanon illustrates how this process takes place. He initially interprets European attempts to modernise Algeria by improving the status of women as a disguised form of aggressiveness: the will to remove the veil means rape, but rape itself is but a personalisation of the desire to subjugate the entire society. Hence, for the Algerians, the wearing of the veil became a major symbol of resistance; through it, tradition was exalted; thus, Algeria too produced its *négritude*. But following the usual dialectical reasoning, such a reaction is regressive: in the process of enhancing tradition, the Algerians became its prisoners. Liberation came with revolution. When women began to function as spies in the European city, sometimes even acting as prostitutes in order to do so, they also shed the veil. Although as the revolution grew they resumed the wearing of it because of its usefulness in carrying hidden weapons and explosives, the veil had now become camouflage. It is no longer part of the enforced identity of the Algerian woman, but results from a choice. By engaging in violence she has become fully human.

More fundamental in its effects than mere nationalist strikes, boycotts, or demonstrations, the armed insurrection of the Algerian people is "the great shock which founds a new world." As a "total praxis," combat can bring about the total transformation of a colonial dependency into a renovated community free of any psychological, emotional, or legal subjection, within which the colonised will be men. Just as for Sorel, the proletariat asserts its existence in the general strike, for Fanon the colonised masses become transfigured through the single combat. Furthermore, as for Sorel the general strike also prepared the proletariat for its post-revolutionary task, so with the Algerian revolution. Fanon argues that the entire structure of the Algerian family undergoes a "mutation." Relationships between parents and children, elder and younger brothers, husbands and wives, lose their restrictive traditional character. The revolution even transforms basic attitudes towards technology. Muslims who viewed the radio as an "evil voice," disruptive of the moral order, now anxiously listen to the voice of the army of liberation; Arabic loses its religious exclusivism, the French language becomes domesticated; a new national *logos* is being created. Peasants, suspicious of modern medicine, become soldiers who rapidly understand the value of inoculations and of personal hygiene; medicine is accepted because it has become a revolutionary weapon; it is the end of superstition. Violence creates a new spiritual unity which prepares the country for the immense task of national reconstruction after the war. The nation is consecrated in blood. Through violence, the Manichean world will be set right again.

For whom was Fanon forging this frightful myth? Where could the prophet find a people in need of salvation? Simone de Beauvoir writes of his passionate desire to find roots in Algeria; "but the difficulty was that, among the leaders, no individual or group represented him fully." He remained an outsider, a black man of the Sudan. And it is naturally to the land of the blacks that he turned during the last years of his life. His aim was clear as early as 1958 when, as one of the Algerian emissaries to the All-African Peoples Conference in Accra, he proposed a revolutionary link between the two Africas through the creation of an African Legion. Although this was in sharp contrast to the non-violent approach favoured by the leaders of established nationalist parties in tropical Africa, he did not give up. After suffering severe wounds when his jeep hit a land-mine on the Moroccan border and barely escaping an attempted assassination attributed to the "Red Hand" while recovering in Rome, he returned to Accra in 1960 as the Algerian ambassador. While the new rulers exchanged diplomatic niceties at Pan-African cocktail parties, Fanon organised FLN aid for Roberto Holden's Angolan guerillas and led a mission to northern Mali, beyond Timbuktu, where he hoped to establish a southern base for the FLN through which black African troops could be channelled, perhaps to compensate for the use of such troops by the French in their colonial wars.

Like Richard Wright, the pilgrim had returned to the land of his ancestors. Like Wright, his reaction to it was one of frustrated anger. The year 1960 was that of independence for all the members of the French Community. This, for Fanon and for many Africans, was a fake independence, granted by France to nationalist leaders who remained her clients; they viewed Senghor and Houphouet-Boigny much as uncompromising syndicalists had come to see Jean Jaurès. The break-up of the Mali federation between French Sudan and Senegal was widely interpreted as an indication of the evil power of "neo-colonialism." But 1960 was also the year of the Congo. In Lumumba, Fanon saw perhaps the embodiment of a revolutionary ideal he could not find elsewhere on the continent; and although he criticised Lumumba's policies (espe-

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cially his initial trust in the United Nations), he clearly identified himself with this son of Africa who led a people and became a martyr and lived to witness the Congo's collapse into tribal conflict, the disintegration of a country into a Hobbesian state of nature. In the midst of independence celebrations Fanon saw prophetically that independence did not constitute a new beginning; the one chance for salvation was being dissipated forever.

The reluctance of the new African nations to assume the burden of their revolutionary duty stemmed, he believed, from a lack of understanding of the fundamental nature of the political world. The African élites had no ideological key beyond a commonplace nationalism. In the agony of his last year Fanon willed them the gnosis he had discovered in Algeria, expanded to encompass the whole world and raised to a surrealistic and poetic plane. The French title of his book *Les Damnés de la Terre*, taken from the first line of the *Internationale*, is more evocative than its English translation. The wretched elicit our pity, but the damned are beyond hope. The lot of the wretched can be improved by a hand-out, but the damned must be born again. In Fanon's hallucinatory imagery which links him with Rimbaud and Jean Genet, the damned are the rat pack, the *lumpenproletariat*, the prostitutes and pimps, the brutal peasants, who invade the city through the sewers. The city goes up in flames. The damned are purified in its fire; they are beautiful and holy.

IN THE FIRST PART of the book, an essay "On Violence," Fanon argues that whatever the formula or the arrangements, "de-colonisation is always a violent phenomenon." The discrepancy between this statement and the actual historical record in Africa provides a significant clue to the tone of the entire work. It is not concerned with providing an empirical description or a sociological explanation of political phenomena, but with shaping reality in accordance with "historical necessity" before it is too late. For Fanon de-colonisation is not merely the establishment of a New State or the achievement of Sovereignty but the replacement of one species of man by another species of man. The world is turned upside down, the last become the first. But this "programme of absolute disorder" cannot result from the touch of a magic wand or from a natural cataclysm. The colonised peoples must will it by a commitment to fundamental change at any cost and with every means, "including, of course, violence." In the Manichean world created by Europe, de-colonisation thus stems from a "decisive and murderous confrontation of the two protagonists" in the process of which the colonised "thing" becomes a man, transforms his being from an "oppressed spectator" into a "privileged actor, caught in a quasi-grandiose manner by the searchlights of History."

The thesis proceeds in Fanon's usual manner, combining a psycho-analytic tradition with a Marxist one, but a Marx whom he does not hesitate to "stretch" in order to encompass a colonial world where the relations of production are themselves a superstructure rooted in the relations of colonialism, and an Engels whose reasoning concerning force can be characterised as "childish." In the beginning colonisation is imposed through violence. The violent reaction it generates among the colonised is turned inward, taking the form of muscular tension, heightened criminality within their own community, tribal wars. An unstable equilibrium is achieved through wild dreams, orgiastic religion, frightful myths, dance, possession. Salvation lies in the redirection of this internalised, self-destuctive aggressiveness, on to apposite external objects, the utilisation of this energy for a destruction which purges and purifies. The most powerful reservoir of violence is not to be found in the cities, themselves artificial creatures of colonialism, but in the peasantry. "It alone is revolutionary. It has nothing to lose and everything to gain...." Once set in motion, it will savagely sweep everything before it, making the temptation to compromise disappear. The inflammation of the countryside is the best way to purge the people of the effects of colonisation. Lest it spend itself uselessly through "blind voluntarism," however, the violent potential of the people must be channelled by a vanguard which understands its use.

IN THE CHARACTERISTIC manner of Utopian thought, Fanon argues that the revolution must be made but also that its triumph is inevitable. Transfiguration occurs only if the entire community chooses the path of "royal meditation," of "absolute praxis"; but he reassures his audience that there is little to fear because the colonial powers, constrained by the fundamentally economic character of colonisation cannot afford the one strategy that could defeat the colonised, permanent military occupation. Furthermore, Africans are not alone: violence in one part of the colonial world has consequences in the rest; Dien Bien Phu and Algeria contribute to the liberation of tropical Africa. The major threat of failure, then, does not stem from the danger of European retribution but from the tragic flaw in the character of the intellectuals of the colonies. It is for them that Fanon reserves his harshest condemnation;

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it is to them that he addresses a desperate plea to share his vision.

Here also Fanon is unwittingly in the mainstream of the European tradition of what has been called "the self-hatred of left-wing intellectuals" (and of which there was perhaps no better example than Sorel). The intellectuals who led nationalist movements are, for Fanon, creatures of colonialism who constitute "a sort of class of individually liberated slaves" yearning to multiply their numbers. At the beginning they contributed to the creation of a useful "atmosphere of violence," but they rested on their laurels—much as Sorel suggested that "a cunningly conducted agitation is extremely useful to Parliamentary Socialists, who boast before the Government and the rich middle class of their ability to moderate revolution." The people must be vaccinated against infection. As the general strike instils in the proletariat habits of liberty, without which the socialist successor state would only benefit the managers, so for Fanon revolution not only transforms colonised man into man, but it "lifts the people to the level of the leader," insuring that henceforth "the demagogues, the opportunists, the magicians will be faced with an impossible task." At a time when most leaders were busily constructing a doctrine of the One-Party State (which was so often endorsed by friends of Africa abroad as a necessary condition for modernisation), Fanon supplied a savage prophetic indictment of the doctrine and its authors.

Addressing himself to the plausible Marxist argument that "bourgeois nationalism" constitutes a necessary dialectical phase, he demonstrates that in underdeveloped countries even the bourgeoisie is underdeveloped. It cannot possibly perform the historic role assigned to it by orthodox Marxists because it is not economically creative. The One-Party State is nothing but a dictatorship of this useless bourgeoisie for its own enrichment. The charismatic leader, whose popularity rapidly declines after independence when the masses discover that nothing has changed, is merely "the director-general of a society of impatient profiteers." Such a system, which widens the gap between the rulers and the ruled, creates a vacuum which can rapidly be filled by indigenous military groups or lead to tribal wars and could easily leave the country at the mercy of a colonial counter-offensive. The flaw in the system is partly organisational: nationalist parties are monstrous urban heads without limbs or bodies. If true integration is to occur, the leaders must rejoin the masses, live in the country, transform the villages, create party wings that are not empty shells. Similarly, he prescribes that after independence, the new economy must be based on co-operatives in order to avoid corrupting bureaucratisation. Unless the masses are politicised, this programme cannot be carried out and there would be only "a minimal readaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag, and far below, the undivided mass, as medieval as ever, continuing its perpetual slow motion. . . ."

But none of this is possible without ideology. The intellectuals must go beyond Marx and Freud, beyond Césaire, Senghor, or Nkrumah. They must follow Fanon's lead, abandon their aesthetic pursuit of *négritude* and throw themselves furiously into the task of creating a *littérature engagée*. They must join him in telling the masses not that the millennium is at hand, not that they must trust their leaders, but that the building of a new world can result only from the efforts of all. They must

> make the masses understand that everything depends on them, that if we stagnate, it is their fault, and if we advance, it is also their fault, that there is no demiurge, that there is no famous man, responsible for everything, but that the demiurge is the people and that the magic hands are in the end only the hands of the people.

In his final exhortation, he urges the intellectuals to cease imitating and to create. "Let us leave Europe," he shouts. The European model has led nowhere, except to the creation of a second Europe more monstrous even than the first. "Don't talk production," but do not seek a return to nature. Do not talk "rhythm." Look elsewhere for models if you must. But the fundamental task is to invent, to discover; to create a new man, a total man. Not only for Africa but for the sake of Europe as well. Paralleling Sorel to the very end, Fanon wills to the damned the burden of saving mankind.

Murderous humanism, a particular current in the mainstream of political messianism, exposes the paradox of revolutionary intellectuals in old and new nations. As it appears in ideology, "violence" is a more terrifying phenomenon than it is for the unthinking who merely practise it as an *ad hoc* instrument. At the same time, however, intellectuals preserve their sensitivity—and seek to avoid responsibility for widows and orphans—by distinguishing between their *noble* violence and the base brutality of others. Sorel ingeniously opposed "force," an instrument of bourgeois oppression, to "violence," an instrument of proletarian liberation. Although Fanon does not draw this particular contrast, he does surround

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his concept of violence with a great deal of ambiguity. He dodges responsibility for possible unpleasant consequences by putting the blame for its use on the other side: the need for violence in the struggle for national liberation is a function of the size of resident white minorities and of its use by the colonial power in maintaining hegemony. What sorts of political acts would bring about ritual purification is never made explicit. In a discussion of "non-violence," Fanon dismisses the latter as a mere bargaining, willingness to compromise. But while a section of the book sub-titled "Of Violence in the International Context" might lead us to expect a discussion of war, we merely find him arguing that the underdeveloped nations must demand aid as a right and back up this demand with the threat of closing their markets to Europe. It would thus seem that "violence" encompasses almost the entire range of political pressure. Furthermore, as Sorel indicated that "it is possible . . . to conceive Socialism as being perfectly revolutionary, although there may be only a few short conflicts," so Fanon explains that while in some situations there is no alternative to armed struggle, elsewhere the struggle may be symbolic only and de-colonisation will be rapid. Having witnessed the horrors of Algeria, perhaps he hoped that such would be the case. By stressing "commitment" rather than consummation of the act, he appears to be exorcising violence as an evil to be feared most while securing the miracle of regeneration.

Why is a miracle needed? Utopian solutions stem from a fundamental lack of confidence in the ability of an oppressed group to manipulate its environment in order to achieve desired goals. Hence, the attempt to create a political magic. Ultimately, Fanon's solution does not differ from the one he had detected ten years earlier in the dreams of black men who sought to become white or to disappear. He has not freed himself from the White Mask and still believes that the blacks *are* less than men. Terrorism and murder are necessary because unless European institutions are totally destroyed they will prevail and corrupt the new world. Fanon's entire work culminates in the pathetic reassurance of a final vision; the New States stand defiant like "proud and naked adolescents," pure and with life before them, facing a senescent, rotten Europe, rendered impotent by the consequences of a dissolute life. The magician has performed his trick. They are powerful, as others are weak.

FANON'S allotted span was short. Unlike Lenin, he never reached his "Finland Station." He escaped the unkind fate of many political prophets by dying before becoming involved in interminable controversies and sectarian splits, and he survives as a legend whom Sartre has canonised in a joint ceremony with Lumumba.[5] His gospel is now beginning to draw world-wide attention. The French edition of *Les Damnés* has sold over 20,000 copies and *Présence Africaine* initiated its translation into English; his earlier works are being reprinted and translated as well; François Maspero has collected his lesser essays into a posthumous book. Although his name does not appear in a listing of "formative writers" cited by African students in France in 1961, the author of the survey—conducted just before the publication of *Les Damnés*—already quoted him.[6] There is little doubt that if the survey were repeated today Frantz Fanon would appear alongside Victor Hugo, V. I. Lenin, and J.-J. Rousseau. It is said that Ben Bella's 1963 reforms were inspired by Fanon and a recent writer on the Congo has drawn attention to the similarity between the prescriptions for violence contained in *Les Damnés* and the tactics of the new insurgents in the Eastern provinces; an American publisher advertising *The Wretched of the Earth* has claimed that the book has "already influenced" the civil rights movement. Within an amazingly short time, Fanon has acquired the stature of a latter-day Old Nick.

As was the case with the messianic thinkers of the 19th century, Fanon's place in political history will depend less on the intrinsic intellectual merits of his works than on its contributions to the creation of a political mood and its emotional association with particular movements. Although his programme is vague and his doctrine incomplete, some of his prophecies concerning post-independence Africa have already come to pass and the explanations he provides for the prevailing characteristics of the new régimes articulate the beliefs of the frustrated "successor generation" who have found, upon returning from their studies abroad that their predecessors have created a world in their own image and that there is no room at the top. Nowhere in Africa can the young intellectuals find a régime which embodies revolutionary virtue. Sékou Touré, who when Fanon wrote was youth's leading hope, is now condemned as "the architect of neo-colonialism" in Guinée. The downfall of Ben Bella has probably contributed to their growing despair. Constrained within the rigid framework of the

[5] In a preface to *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba* (Brussels: *Le Livre Africain*, 1963).

[6] Jean-Pierre N'Diaye, *Enquête sur les étudiants noir en France* (Paris: Editions Réalités Africaines, 1962).

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one-party state they are becoming prey to a separatist mood and to a maximalist dream. In search of allies who can provide the mass support required to revive the revolution, the educated youth encounter the youth of the countryside which has already begun its metamorphosis into the immense *Lumpenproletariat* of the growing cities. Demography is on the side of movements based on youth: adolescents and young adults constitute the majority of the population of the new states. The desperate search for salvation leads them beyond the Left to the Final Revolution, the ultimate, endless, contentless consummation of a world where Fanon's ghost awaits them.

Although, so far, more plots have failed than succeeded, Fanon correctly diagnosed the inherent weakness of régimes based on sprawling nationalist movements; a few blows of the axe can bring them down. What hope, then, for the revolution? Rulers will change, their rhetoric will differ, their emissaries will travel to other capitals. At home, however, the most likely outcome will be "more of the same": a régime with flimsy structures of authority, ill-equipped to cope with the immense task of modernisation, hiding beneath a ritualistic authoritarian façade, and devoting much of its skimpy resources to the maintenance of an oligarchy. Perhaps new spokesmen are coming who will invoke Fanon as the prophet of the Second Revolution. In the end, however, it is likely that his fiercely humanistic spirit will also be consumed in a final tragic irony.

In a Grove Again

We stand in a grove where it's not snowing
with snow in our hair and on the tops of our shoes
and along the life of the boughs that bring
forth the blossoms of snow. It's the life of poems:

The blossoms are ceramic, fired, gold veined;
the boughs expensive; our feet dry. My companion,
alas, is an underpaid Negro named
Eugene hired-on seven years ago at Dodge Main.

He has the brain of a child, and he has a child
named Normandy who lives alone with her son.
In short, his life is as boring as mine.
Meanwhile, back in the car there are talismans:

A heater, the splashed entrails of newspapers,
a speedometer that glows and always reads 0.
We have not come here to die. We are workers
and have stopped to relieve ourselves, so we sigh.

Philip Levine

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THEATRE

Gradations in Farce

By John Weightman

I HAVE one little thing in common with that great man, M. André Malraux, the French Minister for Culture; I am not a keen admirer of French bedroom farces, and I sympathised with the attempt he made two or three years ago to reduce their importance in the repertoire of the Comédie Française. As far as I know, he did not explain publicly why he objected to them, but one may suppose that he does not find them consistent either with the tragic dignity of man's fate or with the prestige of France resurgent. Any President of the Third or Fourth Republics might conceivably have figured in a real-life approximation to a bedroom-farce (as a matter of fact, at least two of them did), but one cannot imagine the President of the Fifth Republic, whose cultural image is, to some extent, in M. Malraux's care, running around in his pyjamas or embracing adventuresses in the Palais de l'Elysée, or even bending his gaze to the level of such antics when they are shown on the stage.

My own objection is nothing like as grand as those I am attributing to M. Malraux; it is simply that French bedroom farce of the very stylised kind makes me feel sad, as I have recently had occasion to discover once again, on watching the English version of Feydeau's *La Puce à l'oreille*, performed by the National Theatre Company at the Queen's. Feydeau doesn't make me laugh, even when he is impeccably rendered in the original by Robert Hirsch, or Jean Desailly, or Madeleine Renaud. The National Theatre Company have been coached by Jacques Charon, so that their performance has almost the speed and ensemble quality of the best French versions. But the work itself, like other Feydeau plays I have seen in France, strikes me as being lacking in some vitamin necessary for fun. I would go further and say that I feel humiliated, on behalf of excellent actors and actresses, when I see them expending their talents on such tawdry stuff; Geraldine McEwan and Robert Lang, who are first-rate in *Love for Love*, are also technically blameless in *A Flea in Her Ear*, but whereas Congreve, like Molière, fills one with that warm glow of admiration which is the ideal spectator-state, Feydeau merely embarrasses, and the embarrassment is reflected back on to the actors. The theatre, in spite of its ceremoniousness, is a very primitive place where the spectator may seethe with disappointed love.

Feydeau has survived, I suppose, because he provides actors with virtuoso exercises in movement and timing and appeals to the lowest common denominator in some audiences. But what that common denominator is, is not readily obvious; it is not sex, as one might at first suppose, because sex is not the theme of the play, it is only the starting-point. *A Flea in Her Ear* begins from the fact that the husband, for no reason at all, has become impotent, as he explains to his doctor, with appropriate schoolboy gestures of tumescence and detumescence. Some people chortled at this; I envy their innocence and doubt their sense of humour. Beyond this point, the plot consists almost entirely of misunderstandings, to-ings and fro-ings and confusions of identity, with the additional excitements of a revolving bed, kicks on the backside and one or two coarse expressions, such as "Piss off!" (I don't remember ever hearing this in real life; I suppose the French is *Foutez-moi le camp*, *i.e.*, Get the hell out of here.) It must be the senseless buzz of activity on the stage that audiences find amusing; the piece has all the mechanism of a "well-made play," but no one inside it, because the characters are not even stock figures, so that the actors have no possibility of filling them out, as they can fill out the types in *Love for Love* or *Black Comedy*. With one exception —the young man with no roof to his mouth, beautifully done by Edward Hardwicke, as if he were coughing up his heart whenever he spoke. Whereas the others whirled about to no purpose, he was truly farcical and one had a sense of relief each time he appeared, because

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there was genuine pathos in his condition. I seem to remember that a similar effect of relief is produced in the tedious wastes of *Le Dindon* or *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* by a deaf old man or woman. From this I deduce that to be able to laugh at a character, I have, in some obscure way, to have sympathy for him, and I can have no feeling at all for the insect-like creatures at the centre of Feydeau's work, who are a stylised product of the desiccated French bourgeois philistinism of the turn of the century. Good farce is always mechanical, no doubt, but it is not just mechanics, like this.

SARDOU'S *Let's Get a Divorce* at the Comedy Theatre offers an interesting comparison, because Sardou was thirty years older than Feydeau and his play is the type of work from which Feydeau's brand of farce was evolved by elimination of essential feeling. It begins as a comedy (it might even have been a serious comedy), and then changes into a farce. Mme des Prunelles and her husband are bored with each other, and she, though virtuous, is toying with the idea of taking a lover. Their situation is one which is endlessly repeated throughout 19th-century French literature; he has "settled down" in early middle-age after a miss-spent youth, and she, being younger by some ten or fifteen years, has come straight from her convent into his somewhat exhausted arms. In Act I, she makes an almost Shavian speech to the effect that the system is all wrong, that girls should have a right to experience like men, before they make up their minds about marriage. It is not clear whether Sardou was sincerely trying to present a "New Woman" or whether, in making this feminist claim, he merely meant to tickle the audience by asserting a preposterous equality of the sexes. No doubt, the latter interpretation is the correct one, since Sardou was a commercial playwright, none of whose works are normally considered as literature and who would not try to violate contemporary prejudice.

This reading is further borne out by the subsequent development of the action. It is falsely reported that Parliament has made divorce legal, and the wife is all set to separate from her husband and marry her dashing, but superficial, would-be lover. The husband pretends to fall in with this plan and, to celebrate the parting on an amiable footing, takes his wife out to dinner and woos her all over again, almost as if she were a courtesan. The lover, unwillingly faced with the responsibilities of a husband, turns into a figure of fun, and conventional respectability wins the day, although the play ends as a bedroom farce, with much to-ing and fro-ing in the *cabinet particulier* of the restaurant. Here too, the action is remarkably sexless, and one is again struck by the innocence of these "naughty" 19th-century French plays. King Edward VII, that emblem of naughtiness, might be seriously shocked if he could visit the contemporary English theatre and witness its cheerful, casual couplings.

The performance of *Let's Get a Divorce* is very ragged, without any of the expert timing of the National Theatre's Feydeau, yet I found it more enjoyable, largely perhaps because of the curious stage presence of Miss Fenella Fielding. Here is an extremely mannered actress, with an artificial throaty voice, artificial gestures and a cawing, cooing intonation that would seem to be absolutely appropriate for farce. Yet through some strange twist, what she projects in a full-length performance is not so much comedy as the impression of a vulnerable personality, which has surrounded itself by these baroque excrescences as a form of defence, or because it can only achieve coherence in artifice. She produced the effect of playing herself as a part, instead of embodying the part in the play, so that, paradoxically, she appeared much more real than any of the other characters, in spite of her artificiality. With such a mixture of eccentricity and pathos, she might well, in a few years' time, make a remarkable Mad Woman of Chaillot.

THESE TWO FRENCH PLAYS, which stem from a dry, stereotyped background, cannot compare in human quality either with *Love for Love*, which corresponds to the mingling of roughness and polish in late 17th-century England, or with Peter Shaffer's *Black Comedy*, which is a valiant attempt to make farce out of the confusions of the 20th-century social scene. *Black Comedy*, I imagine, is meant to be a jolly romp for the cast rather than a serious work of art, and it relies rather heavily on two improbable conventions: (1) that most people cannot mend a fuse and grope about in the dark until the little man comes along from the Electricity Board; (2) that a fuse-box would be sited below a trap-door in the floor of the sitting-room. However, if one can accept these unlikely premises, which may lead social historians sadly astray in 2066, the rest is an uproarious clash of social types—the flustered, bisexual artist (I suppose he has to be a sculptor, so that his "objects" can stand about the room, but he is not very convincing as such, since sculptors are by definition clever with their hands), his different girl-friends and occasional boy-friend from the flat next door, the tippling spinster, the learned refugee workman, etc. The

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device of having all the action taking place as if in the dark gives the actors a marvellous chance to display their miming ability and, of course, darkness is an admirable symbol of non-communication between all concerned, which, so far as I know, has only been used extensively in one previous instance, in the last act of *Le Mariage de Figaro*. But the piece remains simply an entertainment, I think, because the farcical climaxes do not coincide with any major human truth; the best moments are incidental, as when Maggie Smith, the hard-boiled girl-friend, is mistaken in the dark for the charwoman and, through sheer collective pressure, as it were, puts on the charwoman's voice. Another sign that the focus is not perfect is that two characters who spend relatively little time on the stage—the girl-friend just mentioned and the lower-class, antique-collecting homosexual (superbly played by Robert Stephens)—eclipse the principals.

With *Love for Love*, all we have to do is sit back and exclaim about the beauties. This play has everything: a wide range of convincing characters, who appear to bring a whole society on to the stage; constant, and always justifiable, stage business; racy, intelligent dialogue; amusing bawdy; and, above all, that peculiar sense of the fullness of human nature which the outstanding 17th- and early 18th-century writers seem to enjoy through some virtue in their historical situation. Perhaps artistic achievement is always at its best just at the moment when a society has mastered an aesthetic technique and is moving from provincial coarseness to metropolitan refinement. Molière and Congreve are similar in that their theme is precisely the conflict between style and crudeness, with the attendant problem of sincerity and appearances, and they have the same untroubled view of human nature. Valentine, the young hero of *Love for Love,* is not simply a Romantic lead ready to feign madness and to forfeit his birthright through love of Angelica; he is also an impoverished rake who is being dunned for money by the nurse who is looking after his illegitimate children. Angelica herself is no lady, but a clever, sharp-tongued hoyden, who proves Valentine's love by negation right up until the last scene, and is prepared to play a cruel joke on an old man for her own purposes. The whole play, in fact, is cruel, but there is nothing dubious or sadistic in the cruelty; the action has the lustiness of a village prank raised to the level of art, and the most traditional folk episodes—for instance, the wooing of Angelica by the old man, Sir Samson—are wonderfully realised. It is true that some of the characters are flat, but most have more content than one might expect from their old-fashioned, explanatory names or rigid typing; Scandal is a complex creature, saturnine, capable of genuine friendship, a sort of contemplative misanthropist, who functions as chorus in the plot; Ben, the sea-dog, is in one sense only a tissue of nautical metaphors, yet at the same time he has a splendid, rough liveliness. Incidentally, two points in an otherwise impeccable production that I would be inclined to carp about a little are connected with characterisation. Miles Malleson, as Foresight, the prostatic prognosticator, ambled on and off as Miles Malleson, an endearing old soul but not as steeped in superstitious awe of the stars as he might have been. Sir Laurence Olivier made Tattle into a charmingly repugnant creature, but I couldn't see why he gave him effeminate mannerisms; according to the text, he is a genuine womaniser, not a crypto-homosexual, and the ambiguity with which Sir Laurence endowed him created some puzzling effects.

After seeing this deeply satisfying performance, it is sad to reflect that Congreve, who was almost in the same class as Molière in respect of native ability, should have opted for gentlemanly appearances at the early age of thirty and allowed his marvellous talent to wither away without a qualm. If, like Molière, he had been forced to live as a struggling actor-manager, English dramatic literature might have been richer in that noble kind of farce in which coarseness is free from vulgarity and laughter is cruel but wholly sound.

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NOTES & TOPICS

The Stammerer as Hero

"O Word, Word that I Lack."

"THE AVOWAL of such an imperfection in the Handsome Sailor should be evidence not alone that he is not presented as a conventional hero, but also that the story in which he is the main figure is no romance."

So wrote Herman Melville of the one flaw in the otherwise perfect Billy Budd—"his organic hesitancy—in fact, more or less of a stutter or even worse." This illiterate, illegitimate seaman, who is identified with Adam and with Christ, is perhaps the outstanding instance of what has recently become a fairly common dramatic character—the hero as stammerer. As such he has a good deal in common with later examples, though unfortunately it is only the range of his affliction—from a hesitation, through the stutter to total paralysis—that relates him to stammerers of everyday life. Melville's observations about the source of "the imperfection" that leads Billy to strike dead the devilish, swift-tongued Claggart and on to his untimely end on the yard-arm, would not however find much approval, at least not express approval, today:

> In this particular Billy was a striking instance that the arch-interpreter, the envious marplot of Eden, still has more or less to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth. In every case, one way or another, he is sure to slip in his little card, as much as to remind us—I too have a hand here.

Still, if we did believe this then we might well feel that "the envious marplot" had recently been having something of a field day, or garden party.

In December 1965 Somerset Maugham—since the deaths of King George VI and Aneurin Bevan the best-known living stammerer—died in his ninety-second year. This event was, one might think, a fitting end to what could be called with some justice the Year of the Stammer. At Sir Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Albert Finney was stuttering in repertory as the hero of John Arden's *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*. At the National Film Theatre, and on TV, the late Charles Laughton provided an even more striking impediment in the title role of Josef von Sternberg's *I Claudius*, the salvaged rushes of which (contained in the documentary "The Epic that Never Was") proved the movie find of the year. At Covent Garden the tongue-tied Moses vied with the eloquent Aaron in Schoenberg's opera. On television Ian Carmichael affected the fashionable 'twenties hesitation in his successful impersonation of P. G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster. And also on TV—and the most extraordinary of these events, though only in this context—there was the bewildering success as a conversationalist of the Irish humorist and chronic stammerer Patrick Campbell in the satire show *Not So Much a Programme* and its sequel *BBC-3*.

The irony of it all might have amused Maugham, though I doubt if it would have brought much comfort to a man who could write at the age of sixty-four so vividly and with such bitterness:

> I had not been long at school before I discovered, through the ridicule to which I was exposed and the humiliations I suffered, how great a misfortune it was to me that I stammered: and I had read in the Bible that if you had faith you could move mountains. My uncle assured me that it was a literal fact. One night, when I was going back to school next day, I prayed to God with all my might that he would take away my impediment; and, such was my faith, I went to sleep quite certain that when I awoke next morning I should be able to speak like everyone else. I pictured to myself the surprise of the boys (I was still at preparatory school) when they found that I no longer stammered. I woke full of exultation, and it was a real, a terrible shock, when I discovered that I stammered as badly as ever.

And he recalled going on to King's School, Canterbury, where he was persecuted in much the same way that Aneurin Bevan was to be several decades later at a rather less celebrated academy, Sirhowy elementary school in South Wales. Of King's School, Maugham wrote:

> The masters were clergymen; they were stupid and irascible. They were impatient of my stammering, and if they did not ignore me completely, which I preferred, they bullied me. They seemed to think that it was my fault that I stammered.

I doubt if any stammerer in the past twenty years or so has been made to suffer quite as harshly as Maugham was.

AS A PLAYWRIGHT Maugham might have been intrigued by the serious role that the stammerer has been accorded in *Moses and Aaron, Armstrong's Last Goodnight,* and *I Claudius* (we must remember, however, that Schoenberg's opera and Sternberg's film date from the 'thirties), as well as in John Osborne's television play *A Subject of Scandal and Concern* and Jules Dassin's *Celui Qui Doit Mourir,* a 1957 film version of Kazantzakis' *Christ Recruci-*

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fied. For Maugham, like other stammerers (*e.g.* Nevil Shute and Arnold Bennett), invariably created fluent, articulate characters. Even in the closely autobiographical *Of Human Bondage*, the stammer became Philip Carey's crippled leg. When Maugham wrote for the theatre the stutterer was entirely a figure of fun. Indeed the truly great comic stammerers occur in the golden age of pre-World War I French farce where the fundamental cruelty of the proceedings and the brilliant mechanics forced (and still force) the audience to dispense with any scruples of taste. The classic instances are the stuttering cuckold in Feydeau's *L'Hôtel du Libre-Echange*, and, most especially, the lecherous clerk with the cleft palate in the same author's *La Puce à L'Oreille*, now working its old disarming magic on National Theatre audiences who would obviously be shocked at the slightest giggle that greeted such an affliction outside the Old Vic.

If, as I say, Maugham might have been intrigued by the plays I have mentioned, he would have been shocked by the bizarre headline of a popular newspaper's gossip column "STAMMERING IS IN," which of course referred to Patrick Campbell. And he would have been appalled by the title of the recent anthology *P-P-Penguin Patrick Campbell*, which must recall to any stammerer the playground and barrack-room taunts of his youth.

Yet many people have suggested to me this past year, apparently in all seriousness, that I should take some kind of pride or satisfaction in Patrick Campbell's achievement. Which is, I am inclined to think, only slightly less insensitive than commending the popularity of Stepin Fetchit to James Baldwin.

IT SHOULD PERHAPS be explained here that I myself have stammered for as long as I can recall. Like all stammerers I am desperately conscious of the impediment though it is no longer as bad as Campbell's. Or at least so I am told, for whenever a fellow-stammerer's affliction comes up one is always hastily assured that "it's far worse than yours." Indeed nice people pretend that it does not exist ("How *sweet* of you to pretend not to notice," says the aunt of the cleft-palated clerk to her friend in *La Puce à L'Oreille*)—while supplying the word they think you are fighting to deliver, though it is invariably the wrong one. At the same time as they are informing you that you have not *really* got a stammer at all, they will tell you how much it has improved over the past couple of years—which is just what they told you two years ago. It is a touchy subject.

Until the coming of Campbell I had assumed that the stammering joke, like many less innocuous species of humour, was dying out. That it might be having a new lease of life is not something I find particularly disturbing. After all, jokes about stammerers are a good deal less offensive than, say, anti-semitic jokes—and a a good deal funnier.

Now it might be said that Patrick Campbell's success on television is due to his ability as a *raconteur* and it is true that he has a reputation of some years' standing as a humorous writer. But it would seem to me that his sudden *TV* prominence is largely because of his stammer, not despite it. This is certainly borne out by the franker observers of current taste, and confirmed by the title of the Penguin book and the gossip column to which I have referred as well as by the recent Cossack Vodka advertisement which carries Campbell's endorsement and, presumably, was found up to its rigorous standards by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. The advertisement actually manages to have it both ways. "LORD OF THE STAMMER" it is headed, and the opening paragraph reads:

> Most stammerers have the upper hand. People listen to them because they're embarrassed at the poor fellow's plight or because they're fascinated to hear what gibberish will ultimately emerge. But Patrick Campbell has more of a hold on them than that.[1]

It is naturally important to remember that Campbell is a comedian, an entertainer. A stammer if not funny in itself (which it probably is) can be a valuable piece of comic equipment. It is inconceivable that a stammerer—a bad stammerer, that is—would be acceptable as a regular contributor to a serious television discussion. (I recall with embarrassment being present some years ago after Maugham had received a literary award in London. He was persuaded to be interviewed for TV—being assured by his interviewer that the stammer was no problem. The recording went quite well, or so I thought, although Maugham got stuck a couple of times. After it was completed the interviewer thanked Maugham, but making his way through the throng of reporters and technicians who filled the room he turned to me and said: "Christ, we're going to have a job putting *that* straight!") If anything I should say that the situation is even less favourable than in the past for a stammerer wanting to enter public life. Aneurin Bevan, for instance, were he starting out in politics today might well be faced

[1] This line of advertising opens up all sorts of new possibilities that others should not be slow to develop. "Epileptics have the upper hand—but Fyodor Dostoevsky. . . ." or "Most blind people—but John Milton. . . ." and so on.

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by a constituency selection committee reluctant to adopt a candidate so apparently ill-fitted for the requirements of mass media politics. I refer here not merely to the stammer, which is not the sort of thing that is going to attract a stream of invitations to participate in *Any Questions?, Panorama,* or a Party Political programme, but also to the personality that a stammer is likely to produce—spiky, aggressive, unpredictable, yet at the same time highly vulnerable. In short, the wrong kind of image. Nor must one forget the usual assumption, not always unjustified, that a stammer is a symptom of some inner disturbance or conflict.

IT COULD BE ARGUED that a stammerer ought to keep out of public life, and the majority elect to do so. Nevertheless all these recent plays are precisely about stammerers in public life. It is a case, however, of greatness being thrust upon them. Moses, of course, is chosen by God. Arden's Johnny Armstrong has been born to lead his border clan. Osborne's George Holyoake is brought before the early 19th-century courts to defend himself for allegedly blasphemous writings. The previously mocked Claudius reluctantly assumes the Emperor's throne after Rome has been reduced to chaos. The Greek shepherd, Manolis, in *Celui Qui Doit Mourir,* unwillingly takes the part of Christ in a Passion Play and is drawn into leading an insurrection against the Turks. All of them retain their stammers to the end except for Manolis who is miraculously and unconvincingly transformed as he comes to identify himself with his appointed role. And all of them are confronted with an antagonist who speaks with rare fluency. There are the magistrates and judges who humiliate Holyoake and the silver-tongued diplomat Sir David Lindsay who leads Armstrong into James V's noose; but the conflict is seen in its purest form in *Moses and Aaron*. In Schoenberg's opera, Moses does not actually stammer; he merely speaks (or to be precise is given a *Sprechstimme*) while Aaron sings. As Egon Wellesz has written, it was Schoenberg's intention to portray Moses

> as the uncompromising representative of the *idea,* whereas from Aaron an unending flow of images emerges, exciting the people of Israel, so that by creating the Golden Calf he becomes a prey to the creation of his own mind.

An underlying theme of all these works is that a stammer is a sign of integrity, that in the country of the bland the tongue-tied man is, if not actually king, worthy of greatest respect. He is the man who has difficulty over words and, hence, despises the glib, facile, seductive phrase. In an age that has seen the

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wholesale corruption of language and in which the mass media place such an emphasis upon easy eloquence, he is an appealing figure. Or, at least, he is in the theatre, if not in everyday life. To be sure, one has to be careful just how the stammer is handled. Many people have complained of great difficulty in following what Albert Finney's "Armstrong" says, but this could be due to the thick Scots accent and the unfamiliar dialect words. Arden's stage direction says that Armstrong "has difficulty in talking coherently, a congenital defect like an exaggerated stammer that he is only able to overcome when excited or when he sings...." John Osborne's *A Subject of Scandal and Concern* has a characteristically sensible stage direction to the effect that Holyoake's stammer "must be emphasised sufficiently to appear painful when it happens, but obviously it must be exploited sparingly, and its later dramatic effectiveness must depend upon the nicest discretion of the actor and the director." Richard Burton served Osborne well in the 1960 television production; he was especially moving in the penultimate scene where a grisly prison chaplain preaches a sermon directly at Holyoake who "makes an animal effort to speak but nothing will happen." There is a striking resemblance between this scene and the passage in *Billy Budd* where the tragic foretopman faces Claggart in the presence of Captain Vere and is paralysed, "bringing to the face an expression which was as a crucifixion to behold." It is worth noting that Holyoake is Osborne's only wholly sympathetic protagonist—and the only one not blessed by the gift of the gab.

I HAD ALWAYS considered Burton's the finest stage stammer I had seen until I saw Laughton's Claudius. (I use the word "seen" advisedly.) In the documentary film that included the rushes of Alexander Korda's abandoned 1937 production, Korda's secretary recalled that Laughton eventually discovered his model in Edward VIII's abdication speech and "always listened to it before going on the set." This rather odd revelation seems to have been accepted without question by the critics, though it strikes me that the career of Claudius and the stammer so excruciatingly developed by Laughton have more obvious parallels with those of George VI. One can only imagine what the completed film would have been like. It certainly would have been the first picture in which the hero had the kind of really painful stammer that would have affected the audience with the same crawling embarrassment that a bad stammerer does in real life. This is very different from the aesthetic purity of Arnold Schoenberg's treatment where we are never made aware of anything except the spiritual problem involved for Moses. Still, Moses' anguished cry at the end of the Second Act, *"O Word, Word that I lack,"* is in a literal sense the stammerer's dilemma, just as the last words of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,* "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (which George Steiner has suggested is the exact analogue of Moses' curtain line), should be the stammerer's motto.

Perhaps one should be grateful for this serious attention, though the present trend (if such it is) away from the comic or neurotic stammerer of tradition is taking us too far in the opposite direction. There are of course very few occasions when a stammerer appears without his impediment being the major issue, comic or tragic, just as there are not many films in which a Negro appears other than as a dramatic device for discussing colour prejudice. Only two instances in the cinema come readily to mind—the stammering cowboy in Howard Hawks' *Red River* (he gets trampled to death fairly early on in the cattle drive) and, more recently, the flight engineer (Richard Attenborough) who rallies the survivors of an air-crash in Robert Aldrich's *Flight of the Phoenix.*

The stammerer, however, must not be carried away by all this. He must resist the temptation of feeling that his essentially saintly character is at last being recognised, of endorsing the perspicacity of the artists discussed, of arguing that the stammerer's situation is gradually being changed by this sympathetic concern. Even if these plays *were* about the predicament of the stammerer, the result could be the same as our attitude to Arthur Miller's Willy Loman who, as Tennessee Williams rightly pointed out, we can tolerate for an evening in the theatre but would quickly show to the door if he invaded our office during the day. But the dilemma of the stammerer though touched upon on the dramatic surface is not the theme of these plays—why should it be? His life is altogether more complicated and his problems less obviously universal. And they are not problems likely to be solved in the main by a change in social attitude brought about by Patrick Campbell's television popularity or by the coincidence of so many appearances of the stammerer-as-hero on the stage.

STAMMERERS might be compared with members of an oppressed minority group or the physically disabled, and in certain respects they do resemble both. Like Jews, Negroes, and homosexuals they are the object of discrimination (real or imagined), are made the butt of jokes (often involving grotesque impersonation), are cast dramatically in symbolic roles, are the

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subject of much psychological investigation and theorising, and are faced with grave problems of social adjustment. They are like the physically disabled inasmuch as they have a personal handicap beyond their control and the most frequently used descriptions for speech impediments draw on the condition of the bodily disabled—"a crippling stammer," "a stumbling tongue," "speech paralysis." Yet stammerers differ from these other groups more than they resemble them, however much at times they may recognise a sense of kinship and act upon that recognition.[2] Of course there must be an overlap among these groups—no doubt the speech defect would be the least of the worries of a homosexual Jewish Negro stammerer going around Selma, Alabama, in a bath-chair, though it is the one that a change in social attitudes would do least for.

Most people stammer at some time during their lives. They stammer slightly between the ages of two and five when they learn to speak, and later in life when they are frightened, excited or embarrassed. And they are supposed to stammer when they are in love—as the old song has it:

> *Your heart's a flutter*
> *And all day long you only stutter*
> *'Cos your poor tongue just will not utter*
> *The words "I love you."*

It is associated in effect with extremes of emotion. For the stammerer, however, the act of oral communication is for much of the time an extreme situation in itself. As Maugham wrote:

> When I was young and stammered badly, to talk for long singularly exhausted me, and even now that I have to some extent cured myself, it is a strain. It is a relief to me when I can get away and read a book.

But like most stammerers, and despite his shyness, Maugham was constantly engaging in conversation. There is even a drive towards it. Stammerers tend to be compulsive talkers; it is as if every stuttering Moses really wanted to be an Aaron. Few content themselves with developing a written style alone. Aneurin Bevan, for instance, became a clear, forceful journalist, but (as his biographer, Michael Foot, observes) he "could always talk better than he wrote" and was in fact among the finest public speakers of his time. He forced himself to confront audiences, preferably hostile:

> His own real remedy was to hurl himself into speeches or arguments. To the question—"How

[2] As Michael Foot writes of Bevan: "He was driven back on his own resources . . . 'a lonely chap.' Any natural bent towards questioning the wisdom of authority was reinforced. Both his mind and his will were influenced by his stutter."

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did you cure the stutter, Nye?"—he replied, "By torturing my audiences."

So when he speaks a stammerer can also be engaged in an act of therapy and demonstration. He is also likely to develop as a defence mechanism a bitter wit, a sharp abrasive technique. His words are gauged to bite rapidly like acid into an etching plate rather than like water flowing gently to smooth a stone; if his tongue will not do service as a lasso, it will at least function as a whip.

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I AM HERE GENERALISING from the conduct of some well-known stammerers and from my own experience. And yet stammers are like fingerprints—no two are quite the same. One must at the same time distinguish stammers from other impediments. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* between five and ten per cent of the U.S. population over the age of six have some speech defect (which is more than the crippled, blind, and deaf together); I assume that such a rough calculation holds true for Britain as well. But this figure covers all kinds of defect from so-called baby talk to lisping. Only ten per cent of this group (or roughly one per cent of the total population) have an actual stammer—the inability to speak without stumbling over words or getting hung up over particular ones. In the trade the principal distinction is between the *clonic* (repeating) and the *tonic* (blocking) interruption of speech. A permanent stammer usually starts between the ages of two and five. It is without definable physical basis or at least none has been effectively established. There is a great deal of conflicting theory and I personally have nothing new to contribute. In general it is of multiple causation—the continuation of the normal beginner's speech hesitation through environmental and psychological factors. There are plenty of pat explanations, and at the drop of a consonant many people will tell a stammerer whom they scarcely know just how his impediment came about. Bevan's mother, for instance, denied that Nye had always stammered and a family myth developed to the effect that he acquired it by imitating a stuttering relative. Michael Foot rightly dismisses this, though the more orthodox origin he substitutes is not especially satisfactory:

> According to some modern psychologists, Aneurin must have been a shifted sinistral, having been born left-handed and forced to write with his right hand. His distaste for the physical act of writing lends strong support to the idea. But no one knows for certain the date when the consequent nervous disorder began.

The same explanation has been offered in my own case (I can see people whom I have just met watching me reach for my pen) though I have always been left-handed and no attempt was made to make me otherwise. And also in my own case, as in that of most other stammerers, no one in my family has been able to tell me exactly when the impediment began. One feels that it must have happened like Mike Campbell's bankruptcy in *The Sun Also Rises*: "Two ways. Gradually and then suddenly." There is little evidence to indicate that it is hereditary, though according to Robin Maugham this was Somerset Maugham's belief. He reports

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his uncle recalling an encounter early in this century with a remote American relative who had an appalling stammer. This apparently convinced Maugham that

> we're the product of our genes and chromosomes. And there's nothing whatever we can do about it... no one can. Because we can't change the essential natures we're born with.... All we can do is to try and supplement our own deficiencies. Meeting that young man in the Ritz-Carlton made me certain of that.

This is of course, on the face of it, a scientific way of saying the same thing as Melville says of Billy Budd, or of expressing what we read in the Fourth chapter of Exodus:

> And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken to thy servant: but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue.
>
> And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord.

It is, I suppose, a bold man who would reject in the same sentence the medical opinion of Maugham, the literary interpretation of Melville, and the divine revelation of the authors of the Pentateuch.

DESPITE the claims of therapists who advertise their achievements in Underground stations, there are few cases of completely successful cures. (The case is different with other speech defects.) The principal aim of therapy is, firstly, to teach the stammerer to control his delivery somewhat and to lead towards a gradual alleviation of his condition, and, secondly, to have the stammerer adjust to his condition and to see it in proper perspective. Actually the stammer, once it has become a permanent fixture, is more the cause of nervous disorder than the other way around. It is one of the great chicken-and-egg territories.

As a child I never underwent any therapy though until my late 'teens I was scarcely able to get out the simplest sentence without stammering. This was probably due to my parents finding it an impossibly delicate subject to discuss with the family doctor who happened to have a genuinely paralysing stammer. He would sit there, his face locked in agony, his eyes shut; an audience could have vacated the Albert Hall before he got his next word out. A few years ago, a general practitioner, erroneously attributing the results of a period of overwork to my stammer, sent me to a speech clinic. This I attended weekly for a couple of months submitting myself to bouts of Cat-Mat exercises, free-association, and half-baked analysis before it all became too much. As I was at that time doing

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regular scripted broadcasts I felt like one of those resourceful lotharios in "sophisticated" Hollywood comedies who poses as a homosexual in order to seduce the comely psychiatrist. But what drove me away more than anything else was having to sit in the waiting-room with people to whom such phrases as "Have you finished with *Punch*?" were tongue-twisters of "The Leith police dismisseth us" proportions. The fact is, and it is a sad and important one, that stammerers cannot stand each other's company. For them there can be no equivalent of the invalid car rally, the homosexual bar, or B'nai B'rith. Stammerers do not need each other—on the contrary, as I have mentioned before, they seek out and admire the fluent, as Moses was told by God to use Aaron and as Somerset Maugham needed the smooth, personable Gerald Huxton, his indispensable companion for twenty-five years.

I remember with peculiar vividness a visit to my school by Sir William Emrys Williams to lecture on the function of the Arts Council of which he was then secretary-general. After he had spoken about state subsidies for the arts, it was expected of us by our headmaster that, as bright grammar school sixth-formers, we should get up and ask a few intelligent, probing questions. Suddenly and uncharacteristically I rose to ask a question, emboldened no doubt by the lecturer's own stammer—the first public speaker with a stammer (other than George VI) that I had ever heard. I asked him about state encouragement for the cinema and jazz which in 1950 was a rather more unfashionable thing to do than it would be today. Sir William, however, cut me down with an acerbity that seemed out of all proportion to the gravity of my offence. No doubt my memory of this humiliation is even more unreasonable. But even now I can recall the laughter of my peers when it was enquired of me whether I thought that the Arts Council should subsidise the marble players on "T-Tinsley Green," my rising to reply, finding myself speechless, and sinking down again among my heartless class-mates in that steeply raked auditorium. Maybe Sir William thought I was imitating him, maybe he was annoyed by what he took to be a flippant question, and he undoubtedly has long since forgotten the occasion. But I now know that I might well react in much the same way if faced by a stammering schoolboy.

My vivid recollection of this incident emphasises the extent to which an impediment becomes for the stammerer a central, if not *the* central, fact about his life. Rightly or wrongly, it is this which seems to provide the driving force, to determine what he can or cannot do, to colour all his relationships. He oscillates between the belief that it is something extrinsic, for which he has no responsibility, and the conviction that it is somehow all his own fault. There recurs, too, the suspicion that it is the symptom of an inner disturbance and it is, as I have said, useful for him to be aware of this for it is a constant preoccupation of many people he meets, however much the subject may be avoided. Yet as Maugham's story about praying for his stutter to disappear shows, there is a sense in which a stammerer feels at the mercy of the gods or of fate; the stammer *might* just go away or be whisked away. And indeed a stammer can vary from moment to moment often in the most unpredictable manner. Every time a stammerer speaks he thinks, usually in vain, that he might not stammer, and he tries not to—like a cripple thinking every time he walks that he might make it without his crutches or a political fugitive hoping that a frontier guard will not discover his false papers. The stammerer is thus constantly attempting to find for himself a *persona*, a role he can play in which he can pass himself off as other than what he is. In doing this his case is scarcely unique, though his state may be extreme.[3]

I have tended perhaps so far to dwell on the psychological and social disadvantages. What of the advantages? Well, first of all, a stammer is said to be a rather becoming characteristic—though, like drink, it must be in moderation. Patrick Campbell writes that "from my earliest days I have enjoyed an attractive impediment in my speech." William Randolph Hearst's biographer, W. A. Swanberg, says that Marion Davies "stuttered delightfully." Hazlitt said of Charles Lamb that "no one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half-sentences as he

[3] An amusing instance of the variable impediment occurs in a recent film, the comedy-thriller *Blindfold*. A chronic stammerer turns up at a psychiatrist's consulting room and then drops the stammer to proclaim himself a CIA agent. He is able to affect such a convincing impediment he says because once he really did have a stammer but has cured himself by "will power." The analyst warns him that under stress it will return. And indeed it does. For it transpires that this shifty fellow is actually the villain of the piece, an agent for Red China no less. (The producer has already signalled this punch by placing a Negro in the opposing group upon which suspicion initially falls.) After the stammer has several times broken through the smooth treacherous mask, it eventually floods back with a vengeance. The picture ends with the poor chap, pinioned by U.S. marines, speechless in the face of our smiling hero (Rock Hudson). Shades of Claggart!

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does." Such praise is all very well but the stammer robbed Lamb of the chance of a university education and brought further misery to an already intolerably burdened life. Equally, had it not been for the influence of Hearst it is doubtful whether Marion Davies' film career would have survived the coming of sound (though without pressure from Hearst she probably would not have wanted it to do so). The idea of Miss Davies being a film star with a stammer is perhaps preposterous, but judging by the accounts of her friends she was a more accomplished comedian in private life with her stammer than she was on the screen (by dint of endless and painful retakes) without it. Many of her ad-libbed jokes (*e.g.*, "H-Hearst come, H-Hearst served") gained greatly from the tripping delivery.

There are, however, uses to which a stammer can be put if it is under control—as Bevan's became part of his oratorical style. There is, for instance, that marvellous opening to André Roussin's play *Figure of Fun*. A radio interviewer arrives to interrogate a cartoonist. As the broadcasting equipment is set up it is revealed that the interviewer has a terrible stammer while the prospective interviewee is relaxed and articulate. The red light goes on: the interviewer switches into an easy, fluent questioning style and the cartoonist collapses into incoherent stammering. This is the stammerer's dream come true. And it is one of the most inventive uses of stage stammering I have come across—quite different from the usual "K-K-Katie" yokel, the bumbling aesthete, or that old stage and screen device employed in the Boulting Brothers' *I'm All Right Jack* where a stammering union official is constantly getting hung up on *F*'s and *C*'s which, to the amusement though scarcely one should think the surprise of the audience, lead eventually into quite harmless words.

But most stammerers do not have that perfect control that would enable them to follow the good advice of John Osborne's stage direction quoted earlier. It would be idle to pretend, though, that stammerers do not at times take advantage of their impediment or play a little with the tension that it creates between themselves and their listeners. There is a distinction here, however, between the genuine stammerer and someone who adopts the device for effect—a distinction between the afflicted and the affected. The latter is rarely found today though he was quite common in the past and particularly in the 'twenties. Christopher Isherwood in *Lions and Shadows* recalls the skilfully-used stammer of a Repton schoolmaster who excelled as a *raconteur*. He so impressed his pupils that they emulated him and Isherwood remarks that "I sometimes catch myself trying the pseudo-stammer on strangers, even today." The best-known example is the "luxurious, self-taught stammer" of Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited*, the Oxford "aesthete par excellence."[4] The stammer of Ian Carmichael's Bertie Wooster is, I take it, a milder version of this. Undoubtedly it is an effective attention-catching device that within limits seems to work well. Though only within limits; and it is quite divorced from the actual agony involved in real stammering. There is, too, a major distinction to be drawn between being articulate, in the sense of being able to express oneself clearly and precisely, and stammering. Many stammerers are highly articulate in this sense, while a high proportion of people who don't even have to pause for a word are pitifully inarticulate.

It is difficult for a stammerer to convey in print just how it feels to stammer, just as an author finds that a stammering character in a novel presents him with pretty intractable problems. You can say repeatedly that the character stammers, but it is impossible to embody this in the book itself and still make it readable. The stammerer has problems of communication and himself presents a problem in communication. Who can forget that dazzling line, an unconscious precursor of concrete poetry, in Cyril Connolly's parody of Aldous Huxley, "Told in Gath":

> "S-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-suppose," said Reggie Ringworm, who stammered.

It is quite otherwise on the stage. But if one could ideally represent the condition of the stammerer in artistic form it would be neither in a play nor a book but as a surrealist cartoon film drawn by Saul Steinberg from a scenario by Samuel Beckett. It would represent the journey of an alternately brave and timid man and his encounters with three-dimensional letters and words. Sometimes he would be juggling with them; sometimes he would be running across the room with them on a tray trying to serve them to his guests before he dropped them; sometimes he would be sitting alone in the desert with words lying all around him in the sand. Inevitably he would have a face like the late Buster Keaton, my own favourite comedian and a man whose voice no one ever wanted to hear.

Philip French

[4] In reading George Scott's account of post-war Oxford in *Time and Place*, I am struck by the quite extraordinary resemblance between his description of a genuine stammerer of the time, Kenneth Tynan, and Evelyn Waugh's affected fictional stammerer of an earlier generation. At times Scott could almost have been writing about Blanche.

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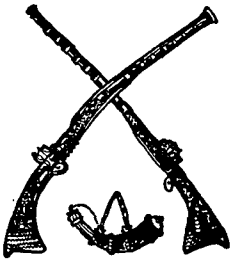

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Marvell Transprosed

By Frank Kermode

IF, AND IT SEEMS POSSIBLE, there are still a good many people who read poetry for pleasure, Marvell must still have many amateur readers. He is probably the only 17th-century poet for whom respect and love have deepened over the last fifty years; being strong as well as delicate, central and civilised as well as idiosyncratic, he also gives hints that there are certain recesses of secrecy in the poetry and in the personality; and these ensure that however the literary historians may plot him on their charts—related thus to Donne and thus to Dryden—the common reader is always discovering something new and surprising. These agreeable shocks usually arise from a rather "modern" blend of novelty and allusive traditionalism: the Mower studying his reflection in the blade of the scythe, "As in a crescent Moon the Sun," is remembering Virgil but giving him a new, rather precious, point. The halcyon of bestiary lore induced a flat calm throughout nature when its time came to nest, but Marvell's kingfisher is partly a real bird, partly a figure for Mary Fairfax; and the evening lull produced by its flight is gently bizarre, nature arrested by various preservatives, offered as a spectacle to musing spectators, and dominated by the one moving thing, a flash of colour:

The gellying Stream compacts below
If it might fix her shadow so;
The stupid Fishes hang, as plain
As Flies *in* Chrystal *overta'ne;*
And men the silent Scene *assist,*
Charm'd with the Saphir-winged Mist....

From this very conceited and brilliant calm one moves, after a page or two of the big Oxford edition, to the incomparable public sonorities of the *Horatian Ode on Cromwell's Return from Ireland*; it is as if the poet has mimicked the progress of Cromwell himself,

Who from his private Gardens, where
He liv'd reserved and austere,
As if his highest plot,
To plant the Bergamot,
Could by industrious Valour climbe
To ruine the great Work of Time,
And cast the Kingdome old
Into another Mold....

From the calculated garden-wit of the first four lines to the oratorical roar of the second is an indication of this poet's range and also of the boldness and certainty with which he operates over it (Between *Upon Appleton House* and the *Ode,* incidentally, falls *Fleckno,* a nasty youngbladish poem attacking the poet Flecknoe for being hungry, Catholic, poor, and the inhabitant of a small apartment; it is full of self-regarding jokes, represents a side of Marvell that was to get rather voluminous expression; the brawler in the House of Commons, the friend of Colonel Blood, the xenophobic polyglot, the satirist. The secrecies of the poetry are paralleled by the darknesses of personality.)

In the *Ode* he is remembering and imitating Horace and Lucan, yet suggesting a most sophisticated political attitude to the events of a precisely indicated moment of history: Cromwell is back from Ireland, and about to begin the campaign in Scotland. The whole sustained effect depends upon a series of rhetorical calculations, of moderation and moderation abandoned, of eulogy and eulogy tempered by intelligent caution. The fluctuation of tone and the solidity of structure marvellously enhance one another, as always in good Marvell. What is in the satires merely scattered wit becomes concentrated, its strength used for structural purposes, in such poems as the *Dialogue Between the Soul and Body,* where a certain generic rigidity makes it possible for the reader to experience the radical seriousness of paradoxes which would otherwise only be jokes. It seems that this chameleontic identification with a particular generic environment, in association with an ironic detachment, a power to pervert it, to alter imaginatively the rules of the game, are what underlie the delight, and excite the intelligence, of the reader. In preferring Marvell

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to Donne, as many good readers do, one is voting for a less argumentative but more various intelligence. One is also choosing the harder poet to discuss.

A CERTAIN CRITICAL VOCABULARY now hard to avoid in talking about Marvell was established in 1921 by T. S. Eliot, when he improved the centenary of "the former Member for Hull" with "a little serious reflection" on his writings. This was one of Eliot's best essays, pregnant with critical formulae that were later to have great success in the world, but notable rather for the real felicity of its attempt to do what Eliot calls "the business of criticism," which is to isolate in some poet a quality that may be "unknown to the present age": it will probably be "a literary rather than a personal quality; or, more truly . . . a quality of a civilisation." Suddenly one sees Marvell in a long historical perspective, a sort of imperial tradition which also contains Propertius and Laforgue, a civilisation of serious but social wit, of "tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace." Marvell's wit can be thought of as consistent with his "Puritanism" provided that this is not vulgarly misinterpreted as having anything to do with the Dissidence of Dissent; Eliot sketches the poet's political and religious positions in a few masterly sentences to ensure that they should not be allowed to interfere with a proper understanding of the seriousness and historical depth of the wit. This, he says, occasionally dwindles into unstructured Clevelandish jokes, but at its best, truly unifying levity and seriousness, it is a highly original affair which is nevertheless "Latin." He is right, surely; the language that reflects such a continuum of feeling, from the ambiguities of the weeping Nymph to the equally ambiguous magniloquence of the *Ode*, deserves to be called *vulgaris nobilior*. It has, says Eliot, an "equipoise, a balance and proportion of tones," that cannot be matched in any poetry since. *C'était une belle âme, comme on ne fait plus à Londres.*

THIS ESSAY CANNOT be matched, either; yet as well as founding a language for the discussion of the poet it suggests, and no more than suggests, ways in which others might develop the subject, explain more fully what that quality, the quality of a civilisation, really was and is. After a lapse of a dozen or more years I have been looking at the reports of the learned on Marvell's poetry, and I cannot believe that I am alone in my dismay at their treason. The trouble, which I'll try in a moment to characterise, had begun before. One was accustomed to being told to look for the key of *The Garden* in Plotinus or in Bonaventura. History of ideas is a slippery discipline. Even the great Lovejoy, a scholar *comme on ne fait plus à Baltimore*, could fall and break the poems he was carrying. And now, in the third and terribly numerous generation everybody seems even clumsier, less aware of the tact required, and of the uselessness of specially got-up learning as an instrument to investigate "a quality of civilisation." The process is one which, borrowing Marvell's own word, I call "transprosing."

What is being said, for example, about *To His Coy Mistress*?

Some people have tried to develop Eliot's observation that its three strophes "have something like a syllogistic relation to each other"; the insight has been over-systematised, but the relation is at least there and relevant to the poetry. But what is one to make of a critic who calls it

> a testament of faith in which Marvell at once rejects the materialism and determinism of Hobbes, spiritualises the Deism of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and cements the union of faith and reason which the Cambridge Platonists thought they had found implied in Descartes. . . .[1]

This is what comes of "applying" graduate-school history-of-ideas to a poet. It is admittedly the most ridiculous single observation I have encountered in some weeks of desperate reading, but it is not at all uncharacteristic; and one can't help considering the implications of its acceptance by an extremely respectable trade paper. It suggests a collapse not only of taste but of elementary standards of learning and even of research method. No doubt talk of Propertius, or Belleau, or Laforgue, would seem to such scholars the chat of an old-fashioned *littérateur*; to treat Marvell's poem as if it were a love-poem, a piece of literary primitivism. The refusal to believe that things are what they seem is compounded by the facilities available to the critic who is willing to treat them as something nobody ever before suspected they might be. Thus, Mrs. Ann Berthoff, in a piece which is very much more sophisticated and literate than the one mentioned above, argues that *The Definition of Love* is a poem about "the soul's exile"—the love named in the opening words is "man's love for his heavenly soul." This in my view plays hell with the poem, and it seems to me that scholars should consider what is implied before they spurn the sense given to poems by the educated

[1] This is the opinion of Mr. P. G. Hogan, and if you are interested in this grim development he has a lot more of the same kind of thing to say in *Studies in Philology*, lx (1963).

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public, and inform *la cour et la ville* that it is guilty of the same kind of mistake as that made by Women's Institutes in the case of Blake's *Jerusalem*. (The same *a priori* argument holds, I think, against Professor Gardner's celebrated desexing of Donne's *Extasie*.)

Of course there are ambiguities. They are the indices of good Marvell, and they can bring into the field of the poem all manner of unlikely information and ideologies. The absence of such ambiguities is what justifies the conventional opinion, nowadays under attack by the professionals, that the post-Restoration satires, and even the Cromwell panegyrics, which retain some civilised reserve, are a falling off. *The Horatian Ode* is, of course, another matter, one of the great examples of this reserve. I notice that of all the articles the ones which deal with this poem are consistently the most illuminating, perhaps because the complexities are in a high sense political, and so involve subtleties of reference in areas where we are more accustomed to deviousness and secrecy. The *Ode*, more obviously than the other major poems, invites us to think of it not only in historical breadth—the precise moment, summer, 1650—but also in historical depth, back to Lucan's Caesar and Horace's Octavius, and the intervening patterned centuries that moulded "the great work of Time." Here is intelligence, expressed not only by severity of manner and constantly modulating tone, but by the panoptic assurance of the history. And that is why the common reader, with whom at this point anyway the learned commentators rejoice to concur, senses that the *Ode* is the greatest political poem in the language. It has a "quality of civilisation" less easily transprosed, less easily lost in some pseudo-scholarly conversion. We can still see it, allowing for quite unavoidable fluctuation of interpretation within what the poem is agreed to be, for what it is.

And it is, of course, an elementary necessity that one should know the kind of poem one is dealing with: that kind is itself specific to a civilisation, as specific as the diatonic scale; and so are the possibilities of certain modulations, analogical transitions, peripeteias, within the known modes. *Upon Appleton House* is unlike any other poem in all sorts of ways, a highly original and curious work. But one knows it better by knowing other country-house poems, from Martial, say, to Georges de Scudéry, whose *Description de la Belle Maison de M. de Balzac*, published three years before Marvell wrote, seems to have been known to the English poet—or to Saint-Amant on the

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hunting lodge of the Duc de Retz, a poem which contains the lines parodied by Marvell in the xenophobic opening stanza of his work. In much the same way one acquires a little more knowledge of certain resonances and transitions by knowing the trick of emblems, studied in relation to Marvell's long poem in a recent book by Kitty Scoular.[2] Scholarship is not barren of itself, but in relation to the kind of programme it ought to have, the kind implied in Eliot's essay. It needs this humane justification, and it needs a sense of the civilised probabilities. Further, it needs an habitually suspicious attitude to one's scholarly self-regard. If you want to argue the relevance of something said by Papirius Fabianus, as reported by Seneca the Elder, to *The Mower Against Gardens* (and it can very properly be argued) you need what the graduate school often forgets to provide, an inwardness with the historical processes by which such relevance may come to exist. This is what I mean by "humane." To say that *To His Coy Mistress* is a refutation of Hobbes is inhumane, and plays into the hands of the enemy. Marvell's Hobbesian opponent Parker disliked the poetic habit of relating metaphor and allegory to reality. "These schemes do not express the nature of things but only their similitudes and resemblances," he complained. But who, in fact, "puts us off with nothing but rampant metaphors and pompous allegories"? Marvell only rarely; his modern interpreters, who do not share his power to control the figures by means of a civil poetic, constantly.

A GOOD DEAL, as I say, has been written about Marvell since the war, but he had not since 1940 been the subject of a whole book; that was the year of M. C. Bradbrook and M. G. Lloyd Thomas' brief and ingenious, but somewhat unbalanced and now slightly out-of-date study (reprinted, 1961). Now, suddenly, there are three such books,[3] and they seem to me to give a pretty accurate account of the ways in which, nowadays, we are equipped to deal with our more interesting poets; if anything, it is a little flattering.

Pierre Legouis summarises his exhaustively vast but now rare *André Marvell, Poète, Puritain, Patriote,* of 1928, neatly alludes to most of the critical and biographical work done in the long interval, and strikes out firmly but amiably at new interpretations of which he disapproves (virtually all of them). J. B. Leishman's book, whatever else ought to be said of it, is the work of an absolutely authentic scholar, of one who knew the languages of civility, as Marvell did, without at all feeling that this required any sacrifice of one's own idiosyncracy; quite unlike anybody else, he understood the sense in which Horace and Dante, Marvell and Rilke used the same *Hochsprache*. Harold E. Toliver is a young American, trained to be a critic with a strong bias to history-of-ideas—the product of one good graduate school and the protégé, via its University Press, of Yale, a university of which it is merely commonplace to state that it has the best graduate programme in literature that the world can offer. For all that, his book seems a culmination of all that is most harmful in the criticism of this poet, and by analogy of any poet. A distinguished critic and historian of ideas, D. C. Allen of Baltimore, says on the jacket that this book will replace all others on the poet: "in fact, any new estimate of Marvell must begin here." If this advice is followed the poet is in for a period of torture, one scholar pumping foreign matter into him as another sucks it out for regurgitation, rather like the cormorants in *The Unfortunate Lover*:

> *And as one Corm'rant fed him, still*
> *Another on his Heart did bill.*
> *Thus, while they famish him, and feast,*
> *He both consumed, and increast.*

Mr. Toliver observes that Marvell "tries out contradictory positions in successive poems" (a habit promptly labelled "Manichean dualism") but thinks that any real ideological inconsistency would be lowering to the subject, and undertakes to provide an "encompassing context" where these opposites will be happily reconciled. This context is a "Grammar of Seventeenth-Century Platonism," and though Marvell wrote "certain small dramas" which he "plays off against" this body of notions, it will afford one at least the diagram of the necessary reconciling context. Mr. Toliver often appears to be revealing his own methods when he describes Marvell's, and we may take it that his aim is "opposition-with-integration." In the poet this trick is very productive, but in Mr. Toliver it gives rise to critical evasiveness, pretentious nomenclature, error, and nonsense. Seventeenth-century Platonism is simply Cambridge Platonism, and one of the most interesting sentences in this book comes in the middle of a long and largely derivative account of this movement:

> Whatever the importance of the inner light to the Cambridge Platonists, Marvell (unlike

[2] *Natural Magic.* By KITTY SCOULAR. Oxford University Press, 30s.

[3] *Andrew Marvell, Poet, Puritan, Patriot.* By PIERRE LEGOUIS. Oxford University Press, 30s. *The Art of Marvell's Poetry.* By J. B. LEISHMAN. Hutchinson, 50s. *Marvell's Ironic Vision.* By HAROLD E. TOLIVER. Yale U.P., 42s.

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Milton, Vaughan and Traherne) says nothing of it... it may seem a surprising omission.

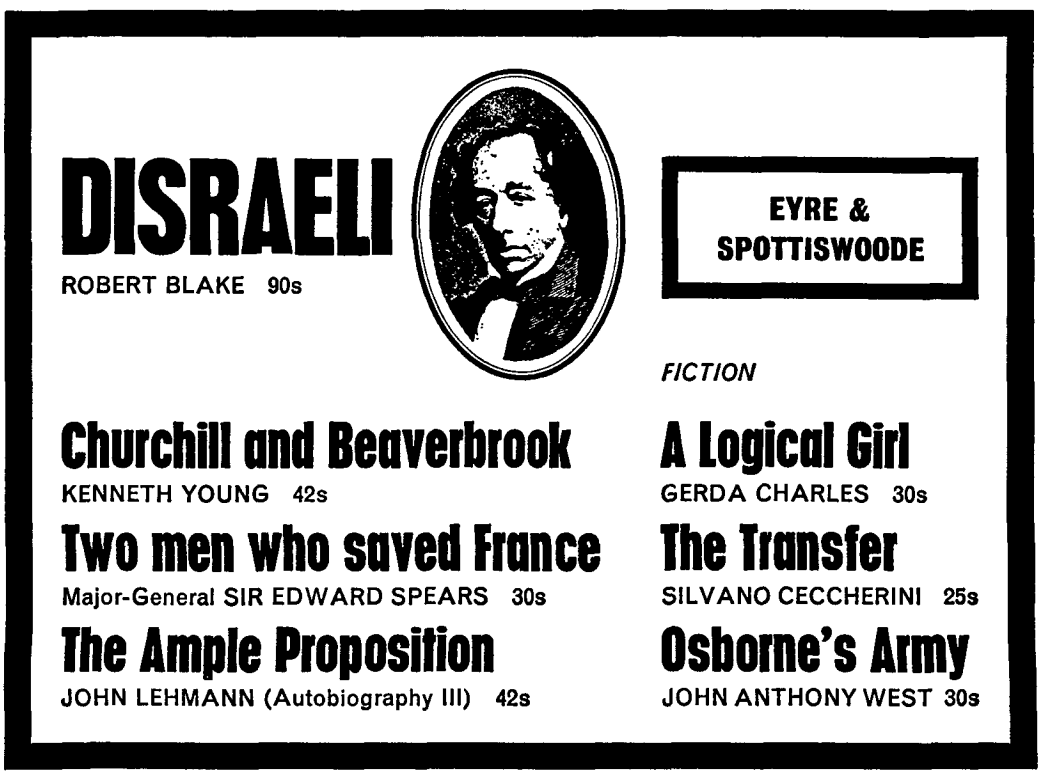
Surely only to somebody who had staked a few weeks' reading on finding some connection and found none? But Mr. Toliver will not put this down to experience; he has put his hand to the Platonist plough; because of Marvell's failure to show interest in that, the doubletalk grows more and more involved ("Marvell thinks in terms of a 'nevertheless' calculus") and ever more fascinatingly appropriate to the procedures of the critic, if ever more remote from the text of the poet. It may mean something to say that Marvell uses a "conjunctive-oppositional grammar," but it means more to say that Mr. Toliver does, and all who claim to make bricks without straw. Marvell, we are told, had "the rhetoric to match the grammar," which means that *his* doubletalk works. When Mr. Toliver comes to tell us about the central conjunctive-opposition in Marvell he speaks of a "combination of levity and seriousness," an admirable phrase, as I am in no position to deny; but he muddles it by involving another opposition, Puritan-Platonist, which, as his history-of-ideas teacher should have told him, is not of the same order of oppositedness, and hardly an opposition at all.

IT MAY SEEM HARD to belabour Mr. Toliver thus, when he is young and well thought of; but precisely because he is, in some sense, the future, one feels obliged to speak thus strongly. The poems, as poems, he seems hardly to care about, and sometimes not to understand. All the effort goes into transprosing. The poet in the garden is labelled *dendro-erotic,* as against Wordsworth, who, because he wrote about an impulse from a vernal wood, is held to have exhibited the symptoms of *dendro-eudaemonia.* Mr. Toliver is a little worried about *The Mower against Gardens,* one of those "certain small dramas," not really fitting the pattern; perhaps the answer is that Marvell also had kapophobia.

In short, these crudely soldered connections with a Platonic diagram, these irrelevant neologisms, have nothing to do with the historical depth and delicacy of method required to develop Eliot's insights. They amount to a rewriting of the poetry in language more congenial to the commentator, in short, transprosing.

> *Ye living Lamps, by whose dear light*
> *The Nightingale does sit so late,*
> *And studying all the Summer-night,*
> *Her matchless Songs does meditate....*

"The Mower's intimate address to the 'living



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Lamps,'" says Mr. Toliver, "reveals his sense of alienation: he is lost and needs light.... The existence of an ideal world of mutual co-operation and moral order is taken for granted, but the Mower sees it from an ambiguous and confused perspective...." The nymph who complains the death of her fawn is really exploring "an inability to reconcile love, art and death with the quest for ideal being." But what this heavy little book really shows is the author's alienation. He is lost and needs light. He cannot reconcile the big graduate words with poetry. If, as seems likely, the major graduate schools are going to bear a heavier responsibility for the perpetuation of a genuine literary public, they ought to be considering whether their better young men should be allowed to write in this way; if they continue to do so it may simply become impossible to defend the academic study of literature against all the people who want to condemn it. Above all, let the purpose and status of history of ideas be given more thought: *Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter* might be a motto in the schools.

This bit of Hölderlin is aptly quoted in J. B. Leishman's book. He was a delightful and eccentric man who died of a fall in 1963, when trying to pick an alpine flower; his favourite 17th-century poets would have found in that accident material for their habitual funereal wit. He was best known to a wide public as the translator of Rilke, but he also translated Horace, wrote learned books on Donne and Shakespeare, and had long been maturing this study of Marvell. It was left unfinished and prepared for the press by John Butt, another fine scholar, who himself died shortly before its publication. Some of the obvious imperfections of the book have therefore to be excused. Leishman, though an exact scholar, was always a writer who found difficulty in moving the argument along, and he was much given to digression; all his books must have called for a great deal of cutting and rewriting, and this one has unavoidably had less than the others. It is in consequence, and despite Butt's efforts, extremely repetitive, sometimes to the point of muddle. In a way this is not unattractive. Forty pages on, one comes upon a page which, with some variations, one had read before, and the sense of *déjà vu* is accompanied not by disturbance but affection. Again, there are few contemporaries who would think it worth while complaining, as Leishman often does, about the way Marvell often spoils an effect through sheer amateur carelessness, and none who would go on to show how easily Marvell could have rewritten the line to avoid the banal expression, the redundant expletive.

What Leishman had—and it gives his book permanent value—was an easy and unaffected understanding of the historical perspective, and of the traditional civility of Marvell's language. He brings in ancient poetry as something he knows in approximately the way Marvell knew it; he can judge the relevance of the contemporary English poets Marvell knew, read and imitated, and some of the French (he is a little light on Italian). His book says more about the kind and the kinds of poetry Marvell wrote than any before it, without in the least neglecting the poet's power to renovate and transform, to make ancient structures modern and modern wit ancillary to schemes which express the nature of things by similitude and resemblance. If he assaults Marvell's negligence he will also, as he writes, pause to reproduce his delight at some breath-stopping line: *"Musick, the Mosaique of the Air...."* Though he appears to ramble, he covers a great deal of ground, saying a lot about most of the non-satirical poems and a great deal about *Upon Appleton House* and *The Garden,* which come in two very long chapters at the end. He quotes very liberally and pleasantly, for example, from Cotton, best known now for the *Evening Quatrains* used by Britten in his horn serenade, but a poet who in one mood was quite close to the more conceited mood of Marvell: perhaps a little broader, as in the jokes of the poem about the Great Frost:

> *Who drew for urinal ejection*
> *Was bewitched into odd erection....*

Leishman's objects were always to inform, and he welcomed informative debate. There are many details in this book with which I disagree, but if there is such a thing as a book to begin from, this is it.

M. Legouis has for forty years been surveying, often with amusement, the progress of Marvell studies; he has been quick to pounce on silliness and unconscious plagiarism—people occasionally report as new some fact recorded in his volume of 1928. Of that enormous book only 500 copies were printed. Many libraries lack it, and it was a very good idea to have an English version, much reduced but brought up to date by the incorporation of new biographical discoveries and the explicit rejection of nearly all the critical commentary of the intervening years. The largest reductions are in the biographical parts, and the author says he is sorry about this; but they remain brisk, full enough for most purposes, and certainly the most up-to-date account of the material. We still don't know very much about Marvell; there are the letters and satires, the Commons speeches, some

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record of his diplomatic activities, the reports of his enemies; a mounting number of slight indications as to where he was at this or that moment. But the variations in his political position are still matters of dubious inference. It has been suggested that he had more than a touch of the high-minded Machiavellian. Certainly his politics after the Restoration seem to have been strong and disenchanted, affected a little, but only a little, by expediency; and certainly—this won him enemies at the time and reverence later—he was devoted to toleration, and to what were to be the principles of 1688. All this is discussed, with sufficient detail, in the lively biographical portions of the book.

In the somewhat more ample critical sections Legouis records and for the most part condemns, in a deliberately old-fashioned and good-humoured way, most of the criticism which does not add anything to real knowledge. In most of his strictures on "misused ingenuity and industry" I agree with him, obviously. But his own comments on the poetry are rarely of very high interest, and he tends to let the word "Puritan" come between him and the poems, calling *The Coronet* "Calvinist" and in general suggesting that poems against sensual indulgence are rather comically un-French, though it would be hard to prove that they were characteristically English. This bias gives some of the judgments a decidedly odd tone, as when he says of the remark:

> *Thrice happy he, who not mistook,*
> *Hath read in* Natures mystick Book

that it is "a bold assertion if one remembers the absolute authority the Bible enjoyed among the English Puritans." This has a touch of Toliver, Gallicised admittedly, and so has the digression on *The Nymph Complaining*, which is Gallic on the declamatory sentimentality of English poetry about animals, for instance that of "cockney Blake." On the whole he finds Marvell "an open-minded but lazy poet," which is not really acceptable; but one hardly expects to agree wholly with M. Legouis on these matters (a book he praises as "the most balanced study of Marvell's lyrical poems in recent years" strikes me as almost entirely without interest).

Nevertheless (if I may employ that calculus) most people who are excited by the poetry want to know something about its author—his employment under Cromwell, his twenty years as M.P., his trip to Russia, as well as his renovation of an old poetry and his invention of a new polemical prose: and Legouis' book is a convenient and wholly authoritative source of information. When speculation is all that can

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be offered he is admirably clear and definite; often, indeed, boldly illuminating, as when he says of the older Marvell that he was "still a Protestant while already a freethinker." As to the rest of the book, its limitations are neatly suggested by the description of Eliot's essay as "profound almost to obscurity"; a man who believes that is not likely to be patient with Tolivers. One wishes that some of the younger commentators could write English as well as this Frenchman, and develop more of his sense of the limits of explanation. In the end, he says, nothing will *explain* Marvell. Like many English poets he was preoccupied with making a living, got into scrapes, enjoyed travel and books, and had "a sensuous temperament, repressed by a Calvinistic education." This may not seem much, but the book is only intended to be useful.

So here are two useful books, after all, with not too much transprosing; and it is still open to anybody in doubt about where he should start to pick up the poems themselves.

Edith and Henry, Perhaps

Edith Wharton and Henry James: The Story of Their Friendship. By MILLICENT BELL. *Peter Owen*, 37s. 6d.

EDITH WHARTON describes, in an unusually lively passage of a reserved memoir, a visit she made with Henry James to Nohant, formerly George Sand's home. She expected the house to bear "some mark of that disordered period," to exhibit "the injured *déclassé* air of a house which has never had its rights respected." Instead, she found the place showing an impeccably decent appearance, with a note of particular responsibility, a sense of its position "in the social scale, of its obligation to the church and the cottages under its wing." James was deeply moved by the family grave-stones, the portraits, the puppet theatre, the garden. After a while the friends tried to guess "behind which windows the various famous visitors had slept." Then James said: "And in which of those rooms, I wonder, did George herself sleep?" And, after a short pause: "Though in which, indeed, in which, indeed, my dear, did she not?"

It is a celebrated moment, one of the more engaging incidents in the story Mrs. Bell has undertaken to tell. The friendship of Edith Wharton and Henry James is a good story already, but it will be even better when all the evidence is in. The Wharton papers are under restraint at Yale until 1968, and while Mrs. Bell has decided that no revelation is dormant in New Haven, it is impossible to be sure. Indeed, she might have waited those two years, having waited so long. I suppose she was so exultant at the sight of the unpublished letters of Henry to Edith, the Amherst material, and the Scribner files, that she could not bear to wait. But an air of professional insistence hangs over the entire book, strangely out of keeping with the urbane, magnanimous atmosphere of the persons under study. The insistence is discernible in the things Mrs. Bell chooses not to do. She is slow in paying her intellectual debts, for instance. She has done her homework, read every word that lay across her searching path, including the words of earlier scholars and critics. Her power of assimilation is notable, almost omnivorous. But a nod of thanks, here and there, would have been appropriate, at least where the debt is demonstrable. She owes Blake Nevius' story of Edith Wharton, to cite an example, far more than her silence on that score would imply.

A delay of two years might also have eased the strain of writing the book. The material available at the moment suggests that it might be adequately handled in a long essay. To make a book Mrs. Bell has been forced to repeat herself, to scan the landscape for detours, and often to supply the deficiency with her own chaff. A number of sentences are quoted three times; we hear more than enough of Paul Bourget, Percy Lubbock, Howard Sturgis, and all those bright young men who accompanied Mrs. Wharton on her motor-trips, doing their best to get on in the high world. There is an impression in Mrs. Bell's book of a small substance being eked out; as the only advantage of her saying "overly" instead of "too," "ill-success" rather than "failure," "numerous" instead of "many," and "not unobvious" in preference to "obvious" is that the chosen word fills more space. Disappointingly, the crucial figures remain in shadow, Walter Berry still as dimly present as ever, "Teddy" Wharton a mere sketch. It is hard to believe that Berry, at least, the central figure in Mrs. Wharton's emotional life, is not to be found, two years hence, at Yale. Our next chance of finding him will be in the authorised Life of Edith Wharton, now in preparation by R. W. B. Lewis.

The chaff that fills the vacancy of material is largely Mrs. Bell's romantic speculation. Some of it is harmless enough. Nothing is known of the illness that Mrs. Wharton suffered in 1895, but Mrs. Bell says: "An insight

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into her troubles may be found perhaps, in one of her first short stories, "The Fullness of Life," which was published in *Scribner's* two years earlier." May, or may not; perhaps, perhaps not. Mrs. Bell lives in the free air of "perhaps." The Bourget estate at Costebelle was visited by James, by the Whartons, "and perhaps on some occasion all three at once came." Perhaps Teddy's neurasthenia was caused "by the emergence, after eighteen years of marriage, of his wife's ability to be a quite separate and manifestly able individual." At a social gathering someone asked James about his Albany cousins, the Emmets. "Recalling that night afterwards," Mrs. Bell says, "his audience wondered whether he had not been first inspired, then, to bring the Emmets and the Temples, and all his old and buried associations to life again in the autobiographical *A Small Boy and Others* and *Notes of a Son and Brother* that he undertook a few years later." But Mrs. Bell does not say who, precisely, wondered, or where the available forms of the wondering may be consulted. On the subject of the "rich, rushing, ravening Whartons," as James called them, we are to think of James fixed in Mrs. Bell's image: "What did it mean, he must have wonderingly asked himself, and confessed that as yet he did not know." The reign of wonder is excessive, I am afraid: I can recall no such gesture in James' writing, no such confession of ignorance on the theme of the Whartons. Again we are to think of Mrs. Wharton toying with the vision of herself as a new George Sand, boldly throwing aside the Dudevant chains: "Could this happen to her? She may have both wished and feared such a history," Mrs. Bell says. Chaff, Madame, chaff. And some of it is offensive. Mrs. Bell refers to Walter Berry as Mrs. Wharton's "closest intimate of many years—perhaps, sooner or later, her lover." Perhaps be damned; there is not a shred of evidence, or even of probability, that Berry was ever Mrs. Wharton's lover. That she was deeply in love with him is quite clear from the fragments of her Diary quoted some years ago by Wayne Andrews, but that is another matter. Speculating again in this irresponsible way, Mrs. Bell interprets another scene touched in the Diary: "Did she voice any part of these longings? Her diary does not say, but somehow, it seems, Berry responded with word or gesture that shattered her dream. Perhaps his attitude suggested that mistress rather than wife was his conception of her future with him." This is a grotesque suggestion, based on absolutely nothing. All the evidence points the other way; that Berry told

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METHUEN

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his passionate friend that he was not in love with her. This, too, is merely a speculation on my part, no more authoritative than Mrs. Bell's; but certainly, on the available evidence, no less. Mrs. Bell cannot accept the Wittgensteinian fact, the law of scholarship, that whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. She seems to think that the cause of scholarship is well served by filling every void with a romantic dime novel.

This is a pity, because it spoils a delightful subject. On every level the relation between Edith Wharton and Henry James is a magnificent fact. As a novelist, Mrs. Wharton is, as everyone has said at one time or another, a Jamesian. Many of her themes, as Mrs. Bell remarks, are cousin to James', especially in the international stories. The difference, genius apart, is that Mrs. Wharton's treatment of those themes is like a first draft of a Jamesian fiction. Sometimes, as in *The Custom of the Country* and *Summer*, the first draft is exactly what is wanted, and a Jamesian revision of the question would be as destructive in these cases as in, say, *Ethan Frome*. But in *The House of Mirth* and in many of the short stories in *Xingu* and *The Descent of Man*, Mrs. Wharton tends to give up her characters at the point where, to a Jamesian mind, they begin to be really engrossing. We see this in comparing Lawrence Selden of *The House of Mirth* with John Marcher of *The Beast in the Jungle* or Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors*. James' interest in his leading characters was endless, Mrs. Wharton's interest was liable to be ended, sooner than one would expect, by a touch of theatre or a snap of malice. The last interview between Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden is a case in point: the speech in which Lily asks him to retain her second self is theatrical, in the limiting sense, because Mrs. Wharton found the theatrical an irresistible way of dealing with a problem. This is not to say that the novels might have been longer and better, but that she might have cared more, as James cared more, for the inner fate of her characters. In her fiction the answer follows too smartly upon the question, as if like the skeleton in the cupboard it had only to be discovered by opening the right door. This is why, even when she determined to extend the range of her sympathy to cover the lower orders, the facts are observed but they are not imagined. Gifted as she was in the idiom of sentient renunciation, she could not have written James' *The Bench of Desolation*.

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MRS. BELL is mainly concerned with the friendship, and it is, indeed, a remarkable friendship. She is surprised to find James participating so fully, sharing Mrs. Wharton's distress in her marriage, encouraging her at the beginning of her trouble to live by the given forms, but in the end congratulating her upon the divorce. But James did not live as the detached spectator, the watcher in the cage, who figures so usefully in the novels. Even when he could do nothing to help, as in Mrs. Wharton's case, the vigour of his care, the quality of his admiration, was so constantly operative as to constitute a "doing." This emerges from the letters which Mrs. Bell quotes, from the bilingual discriminations, the heuristic explanations, the affectionate teasing. Indeed, admiration is the note one comes back to. It is exhilarating, reading the intimate literature of the great Victorians and the writers who grew up in the last years of the century, to note how ready they were to admire, and the resilience of the admiration. This is the air they breathe. James' literary essays are classic manifestations of this spirit. Twentieth-century literature, it often appears, is conducted in a thinner atmosphere of envy, spite, recrimination, only partly explained by the fact that the living is harder. The note of James' last years, in his letters to Mrs. Whar-

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ton, is the sound of particular admiration; his delight that there was now, more than ever, so much to admire, to appreciate. Indeed, the most vivid part of Mrs. Bell's book deals with those last years, when Mrs. Wharton was inspired by the War to live a new life of action and service. James thought her, for the first time, heroic in her selflessness, living on a new scale, by new values, new recognitions. This was, at last, the real thing. In his last letters we see him again taking the full strain of her meaning, her fine distinction.

Denis Donoghue

The Spy to End Spies

On Richard Sorge — By John Le Carré

THE RUSSIAN ARMIES were driving in triumph into the heart of Germany. Jubilant Moscow crowds proclaimed the anniversary of the Russian revolution. In Sugamo prison in Tokyo, Richard Sorge, subject of the vanquished, agent of the victors, denied by both, walked to his execution: the date was 7 November 1944.

This was not the only irony. In 1941 Sorge had given to his Russian masters the exact date on which the German armies would invade the Soviet Union. At the hour of victory, this report was still rotting in a file marked "dubious intelligence," and the two Soviet officers who had controlled Sorge's activities lay in their graves, purged as enemies of the people.

On 5 November 1964, Richard Sorge was awarded the supreme decoration of "Hero of the Soviet Union." The Soviet press burst into song about his great contribution to the war effort; a Moscow street, a Russian tanker, and a four-Kopek stamp now all commemorate his name. General Berzin and Colonel Borovich of Soviet Military Intelligence have been awarded posthumous recognition. In the atheists' paradise, their souls, like Sorge's, may survive in peace.

In recognising Sorge the Soviet Union has made an unprecedented recognition of his profession:

> A Spy is above all a man of politics . . . he must have the breadth of thought of a strategist, and meticulous powers of observation. Espionage is a continuous and demanding labour which never ceases. . . .
>
> Least of all was Sorge like those secret agents whom certain Western authors have created. He did not force open safes in order to steal documents; the documents were shown to him by their very owners. He did not fire his pistol to penetrate the places which he had to penetrate: the doors were graciously opened to him by the guardians of the secret. . . .

The doors were indeed open to Sorge in Tokyo: in Moscow they were closed at the only time it mattered.

Two Oxford dons, Deakin and Storry, have at last achieved what eluded all other biographers of this strange man, a cool, historical narrative, scrupulously documented, of Richard Sorge's life and work.[1] It is not a book exclusively for students of espionage. Like the Soviet commentator, the authors see Sorge as a man of politics; their admirable quest took them from the hectic, maladroit conspiracies of German Underground Communism in the 'twenties to the little drawing rooms of commercial hotels in Saigon; their researches zigzag to England and America; in pursuing the early life of their subject, they breathe the common air of Hiss, Chambers, and Maclean; their world, in these early pages, is animated not only by the great historical movements between the wars, but by the lonely deciders who haunt the fringes of the political desert. A lost community of displaced dreamers is here revealed; Sorge's ghost has marched to glory, but behind him in wretched procession come the lost intellectuals, the lost patriots, the

[1] *The Case of Richard Sorge*. By Frederick William Deakin and Richard Storry. Chatto & Windus, 35s.

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lost priests, defending countries and religions of which our children may never hear, a fanatic riff-raff from a ruined century.

What man emerges? Deakin and Storry offer no real analysis of Sorge's motive. Perhaps that is the book's great merit: it leaves us to write the last chapter for ourselves. The material for doing so is there in plenty. Sorge was an intellectual of sorts; he had at least a robust and competent intelligence. He says of himself—he was not a modest man—that in peaceful times he would have been a scholar. He was a comedian in the sense of Graham Greene, an artist in the sense of Thomas Mann. Like Spinell in Thomas Mann's *Tristan* he is always working at an unfinished book. It was at his bedside, together with an open volume of 16th-century Japanese verse, at the time of his arrest. He played the Bohemian, keeping a pet owl in a cage in his room, drinking and whoring his way to triumph. He was an entertainer; people (even his victims) loved him; soldiers warmed to him immediately. He was a man's man, and like most self-appointed romantics, had no use for women outside the bedroom. He was an exhibitionist, I suspect, and the audience was always of his own sex. He had courage, great courage, and a romantic's sense of mission: when his colleagues were arrested he lay in bed drinking saké, waiting for the end. He wanted to train as a singer; he is not the first spy to be recruited from the ranks of failed artists. A French journalist describes him as possessing a "strange combination of charm and brutality." At times, he undoubtedly betrayed the symptoms of an alcoholic.

These then are the characteristics he brought to spying. What did spying give to him? A stage I think; a ship to sail upon his own romantic seas; a string to tie together a bundle of middle-range talents; a fool's bladder with which to beat society; and a Marxist whip with which to scourge himself. This sensual priest had found his real métier; he was born wonderfully in his own century. Only his Gods were out of date.

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CONSTABLE

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LETTERS

Long-Legged Fly's Reply

I WANT TO CORRECT one point in Richard Hoggart's review ["The Dance of the Long-Legged Fly," ENCOUNTER, August] of my book, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. Namely, the point where he discusses the final scene in my article about Robert Harrison, the former editor of *Confidential*. Harrison is in Lindy's restaurant, on Broadway, talking to me about the old days at *Confidential* and the part Walter Winchell played in its success, and he looks up and there is Winchell coming in the door. Mr. Hoggart finds this so implausible, he concludes that I made it up. The fact is that the whole thing happened just as I described it. There are four people I can think of who could have verified it for him. Every fact in the story, including that scene, was checked out at the time by the research staff at *Esquire* before it ran. They do that with every article that goes into the magazine. But frankly, I can't see why Mr. Hoggart found the scene implausible in the first place. I think I made it pretty clear that the real reason Harrison was in Lindy's that Sunday was that he hoped to run into Winchell. At one point Harrison left the table and his girl friend Reggie said: "Bob [Harrison] comes over here to Lindy's quite a bit. He'd like to, you know, he kind of hopes he'll run into Winchell and sort of see if they're still friends. You know." (Page 196 in the book.) Harrison had just started a new publication and apparently hoped Winchell would like it and give it a boost, as he had with *Confidential*. Lindy's has always been one of Winchell's favourite spots in New York. In fact, the patronage of Winchell and several other outstanding American newspapermen, Damon Runyon among them, made Lindy's the most famous restaurant on Broadway. Harrison wanted to run into Winchell and that was the natural place for him to go.

I don't think Mr. Hoggart would have found the passage so exceptionable had he been more familiar with the techniques of what has been called the New Journalism in America. It involves, as a rule, longer and more intensive stretches of reporting than are commonly undertaken by magazine writers in any other country. The Lindy's scene took place after about four hours on my first day with Harrison. But on other stories I have accompanied people for days, even weeks, to make sure I was present when interesting scenes in their lives took place. I made four trips to North Carolina and Georgia to do the story on Junior Johnson, the stock car driver, spending four or five days with him each time. This sort of thing is now standard practice among America's best magazine writers—the New Journalists—all of whom work too hard and too well to have to resort to anything other than the material they have recorded. Several, myself among them, use literary techniques that, heretofore, have been confined largely to fiction—scenes, extended dialogue, shifting points of view, dramatic climaxes—but all of it is quite real. Not only that, we use them better than most fiction writers now working because we dig out better material, we are more objective and we are not beset with the various geriatric illnesses of literary intellectualism that most writers, in England and America, contract incurably at about age 17.

But this is getting to be a whole discussion of the New Journalism and the twilight of the literary intellectual, something I would like to go into more fully at a later date.

TOM WOLFE

New York

I'VE NEVER doubted that Harrison met Winchell at Lindy's, that he went there on the day Mr. Wolfe describes specifically in the hope of meeting Winchell. I was questioning something trickier: the New Journalism's presentation of "reality" through the techniques of fiction. But I can best quote from Mr. Wolfe's own letter "[We] use literary techniques that, heretofore, have been confined largely to fiction—scenes, extended dialogue, shifting points of view, dramatic climaxes—but all of it is quite real." It is what is meant by "quite real" that intrigues me and I hope Mr. Wolfe will keep his promise to expand on it. Until he does, I shall have to keep saying to myself—borrowing a turn of phrase from Pascal—that "art has its reality, just as life—but they are not the same."

RICHARD HOGGART

University of Birmingham

"To Traduce or Transfigure"

GEORGE STEINER'S stimulating reflections on translation in your August issue include some specimens of the art. One of these exhibits, intended to exemplify "a great poetic translation," is unfortunate. I refer to Robert Lowell's rendering of an octave by Osip Mandelstamm. Technically the original is wholly in the 19th-century tradition. It consists of strictly metred rhymed couplets. The effect of the rhythm and the melody is lost in the loose "imitation," but, what is more important, it is marked by not a few pointless and, indeed, misleading departures from the meaning of the original. Some of them are due to his having relied on an incompetent informant (I believe Lowell has no Russian). The third line of the translation reads: "Someone marvellous is hurrying me on to forget everything." The Russian for "marvellous" is *chúdnyi,* but Mandelstamm used the word *chudnói,* which means "queer, odd." Incidentally, he said not "everything" but merely "something." Again, the original reads: "It is stuffy, and yet I am dying to live." The translator not only misses the pun, and therewith the connection between the two phrases, but also introduces a bizarre statement: "It's boring how much I want to live."

Similar errors, sometimes real howlers, occur in Lowell's other translations from the Russian. A line of a love poem by Mandelstamm reads, in the

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original: "I stand at your threshold." This is rendered: "I stand on a steep cliff by the sea." You rub your eyes. Well, *porog* means "threshold," but also "rapids" (in a river)—a denotation totally impossible in the context. Is misunderstanding of the Russian the cause of this mistranslation? And here is a distortion of a complex variety. The end of another Mandelstamm poem reads, in the original: "You do as you wish, but I will take no chances,/I, who have *not enough* heat under my glove/To ride around all Moscow, the whore." This is the version that we are given: "You do as you wish, but I am not afraid/who has *enough* heat behind his gloves to hold the reins/and ride around Moscow's ribbon of boulevards." What moved the translator to make Mandelstamm say the opposite of what he actually did say is beyond comprehension. Other changes are less puzzling. In bringing "reins" into the picture Lowell must have forgotten that the two people in the poem ride not in a horse-drawn vehicle but in a trolley. Finally, Moscow's "ribbon of boulevards" (they are circular") appear on the scene apparently because Lowell's informant, not realising that *kurva* is colloquial Russian for "whore," decided that the word was related to the Latin *curvus* (curved).

It would seem to be axiomatic that whatever liberties the translator may now avail himself of, he must at least be certain of the prose sense of the original.

AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY

New York

"Tango", Ideas, and the Drama

A Reply to John Weightman — By MARTIN ESSLIN

JOHN WEIGHTMAN'S review of *Tango* [ENCOUNTER, Sept.] and of the discussion about the play at the Aldwych (in which I took part) raises some points of principle important enough to deserve a return to the subject.

To start with Mr. Weightman's remarks about the discussion: I entirely agree that to expect a meaningful debate about so complex a subject as the significance of a play like *Tango* from a theatre full of people may be over-optimistic. Yet to have evoked an article as thoughful and constructive as Mr. Weightman's must in itself be regarded as something of a triumph; in fact the debate evoked more than one article capable of dispelling some of the fog of ignorance which most critics had succeeded in spreading over this important play. (I can assure Mr. Weightman that my own strictures on the critical fraternity—of which incidentally I regard myself as one—did not apply to writers of his intellectual stature and distinction.) Hence, in spite of its Quixotic nature, the attempt must be adjudged a success, whatever its theatrical effectiveness.

Secondly: Mr. Weightman compares *Tango* to *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Cherry Orchard* and denies it a place on the level of those two masterpieces. He may or may not be right about this. Only time can tell whether a play will achieve the status of a classic. On the other hand, the very possibility of making the comparison shows that *Tango* is anything but a negligible play. The purpose of the discussion was precisely to draw attention to this fact, after most critics *had* dismissed it as a negligible play. Mr. Weightman goes so far as to say that "it is easy to see that *Tango* is an 'important' play in that it crystallises a certain moment of Polish, and perhaps of European, history." That, precisely was the tenor of my argument and of my quarrel with the critics who confessed their ignorance of any European, let alone Polish politics and history, when they failed to see this aspect of the matter.

So far so good. Mr. Weightman liked the first act of *Tango*, he goes so far as to admit that "if the whole play had been on the level of Act II I could have seen it as the great work that Mr. Esslin says it is." Now, considering most plays we get to see in London nowadays, that, I should deem, is high praise indeed. How many second acts on the level of masterpieces do we get in a year, in five years? But "Act III is a let-down. By opting for the hysterical exercise in power, Arthur is not discovering something new in the 1930s; he is falling back on the essence of Nazism...." Here I am afraid Mr. Weightman emulates the bulk of the critical fraternity. The play is not about the 1930s or about any other decade of this century. The play is about the dialectics of revolution (among many other things). The revolution starts on the cultural level by an undermining of established standards and values. When the victorious revolutionaries want to re-establish a settled order, a normality, they find that there are no values to uphold such an order with, and they are *left with* (they do not opt for) the naked exercise of power. Mr. Weightman goes on: "In any case, the dilemma is false: we are not obliged to choose between a return to morning-coats and top-hats on the one hand and indulgence in arbitrary powers on the other."

SURELY A LITERARY CRITIC of Mr. Weightman's eminence must have come across the phenomenon that in literature sometimes complex situations are expressed by metaphorical images. The morning-coats and the top-hats stand for the formalism of the past which cannot be made meaningful after the values on which they were based have been destroyed (cf. Napoleon's attempt to recreate an aristocracy and a court after the destruction of the old aristocracy). In a situation of ideological bankruptcy only naked power remains. It is here that Mrozek's point becomes universal.

Take our own social revolution of the last twenty-five years. The Conservatives tried to re-introduce a society of morning-coats and top-hats (metaphorically speaking of course) and as the basis of

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that kind of formality had gone once and for all, there remained an ideological vacuum, naked power in fact although in this case it expressed itself in economic rather than political forms. Has the Labour Party any ideological reality left to it today? Hardly. What remains? Manoeuvrings to hold on to power. Is not the situation similar in Gaullist France, another Western society which has lost its ideological foundation and is left with a regime exercising power in a vacuum?

Mr. Weightman finds it difficult to understand why Arthur, having established his rule in an ideological vacuum, is brought down by his fiancée's confession of her real or imaginary unfaithfulness with the brutal proletarian. "Why is Arthur's fiancée unfaithful to him, or why does she say she is, if she isn't? Not through any convincing motivation, but simply to break him down, so that the action can be brought to a close." Mr Weightman must have nodded off to sleep at this point. The motivation is very strong indeed. Arthur is about to murder his uncle (to demonstrate that he means business about exercising power for its own sake) and she shouts out her confession to distract him from this enterprise. And because Arthur, the intellectual, the ex-idealist, still has the moral scruple, the remnant of human weakness, which is the Achilles-heel of the idealist, he *is* distracted from the murder and loses his self-control; he thus leaves himself open to the knock-out blow from the savage, natural man, the unintellectual proletarian who is totally free from many such vestiges of the ideological past and its standards. What Mrozek demonstrates here in the most telling theatrical terms is simply the fact that the ex-intellectual is not the man who can best exercise naked power, or play the game of naked power politics. Ultimately in such a situation those will take over who are completely unscrupulous, vulgar and brutal without reflection.

I like Mr. Weightman's innocence in these matters. He thinks that Eddy, the savage vulgarian "cannot signify Communist dictatorship because... he is a crass gigolo-spiv who has no ideology and shows no flicker of intelligence until the last scene." Mr. Weightman should have told this to the audience in Warsaw. They would have roared with laughter. The point about a good many latter-day Communist régimes is precisely that they have no ideology and show no flicker of intelligence. Mr. Weightman should ask some Chinese ideologists whether they thought Khrushchev any different from Eddy. Indeed, Eddy allies himself with the old cavalry-officer uncle to cover his ideological nakedness with the rags of the most old-fashioned patriotism. That too is something an East European audience (and an English one for that matter!) will readily recognise as a realistic description of a real situation.

Finally, Mr. Weightman asks why Eddy and the old uncle dance the tango at the end, why the play is called *Tango*. I am afraid that Mr. Weightman must have nodded off for a moment in Act I as well. There at the very beginning of the play the idea is carefully planted (and I know from a number of people who did not know the play when they went to see it that the passage is clearly noticeable without any previous briefing) when his father tells Arthur: "Had you lived in those times [before the cultural revolution] you would realise how much we have done for you. You have no idea what the world was like. Can you imagine what courage it took even to dance the tango?". The tango then is the symbol for the freedom which the revolution aimed at achieving, the harmless dance step which then seemed daring, even obscene. This was the first aim of the revolution. And at the end: when it has run its destructive course, it is the symbol of the absurdity of the revolution. To be able to dance the tango everything has been destroyed. It is an image of great theatrical power and irony to which audiences respond on either side of the Iron Curtain, precisely because it is so clear, so telling.

Mr. Weightman raises the question as to the intellectual content of drama. He seems to think that drama is less able to deal with ideas than the "novel or didactic poetry, where ideas are more prevalent." And he seems to think that what Shaw did when he demanded a more didactic theatre was precisely to attempt to get more ideas into drama. This too seems to me an astonishingly naïve view. It is not the ideas that are *talked about* that constitute the intellectual content of a play, it is the ideas that are embodied, personified, concretised in the *action* and the *characters* of the play itself. *Oedipus* tells us much about human fate and human folly, but least of all in those choruses which explicitly speak about these matters. Those choruses merely spell out what is already implicit in the action. Indeed, drama is a form of thought: thought about human behaviour, human relationships and their wider implications. *Lear* contains more thought about old age and family relationships than a whole library of psychological or sociological case studies.

I find the refusal on the part of critics who spend so much time in the theatre to regard theatre as a pursuit worthy of serious thought distinctly odd; but the same attitude in an academic is even odder. In his article Mr. Weightman patronisingly admits that he loves watching actors but implies that there can be nothing more in drama. And then no doubt he returns home and prepares his next course of lectures on Racine or Molière. At what point does the theatre change from actors exhibiting their profiles to a text worthy of serious attention as an expression of the thoughts, feelings and ideas of an age? After three hundred years? Or two hundred and fifty? Or just a century? Or ten years? Or five?

While Mr Weightman is still patronisingly dismissing Mrozek I already perceive dozens of academics setting out on writing weighty volumes on "The Idea of Revolution in Slawomir Mrozek's Early Plays" which will get them fat posts in American—or even newly founded British—universities. Good luck to them. After all they are serious scholars schooled in dealing with serious matters, not just mere stupid exhibitionist theatre folk totally incapable of rational thought, let alone ideas!

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Westminster

SIR J. HOBSON *asked the Attorney-General how many obscene novels and obscene magazines, respectively, were seized by the police and customs authorities in 1965.*

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: *180,808 books and* 1,076,139 magazines.

SIR J. HOBSON: *Is there any reason why the number of novels dealt with in 1965 was less than half the number dealt with in any of the previous five years?*

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: *The difficulty is that the flood of pornography arose when the last Conservative Government, in 1961, lifted the restrictions on the importation of printed matter. The authorities did what they could to stop the flood. Unfortunately, saturation point having been reached, what is going on now is a topping-up procedure. The authorities are doing the best they can to prevent the flood so unhappily initiated under a Tory Administration.*

MR. FREESON: *Can the Attorney-General tell the House what size staff is employed to arrive at the conclusion that such huge quantities of imported literature should be designated as pornographic?*

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: *I do not think that it needs a great staff to decide that. This stuff is filthy trash, and nobody has any difficulty in identifying it as such.*

MR. WILLIAM PRICE: *Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House whether or not the police have seized any of the obscene literature being publishd by the Tory Central Office?*

SIR G. NABARRO: *Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman recall that the precursor of this flood of pornography was the legitimising of the distribution of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"? Does not he recall, also, that the leading counsel who won the case was the present Lord Chancellor—a Socialist?*

HANSARD (vol. 731, no. 48)

Washington

THOUGH *our native tongue here is extremely difficult for the English-speaker, a few basic phrases will take him a long way. Here are some of the most useful:*

(1) "Where is the White House?"—"Can you assist in the successful effectuation of my desire to see the White House by indicating along which direction I am most likely to achieve implementation?"

(2) "Help!"—"I hereby request the authorisation of an assistance programme utilizing the expenditure of any available resources earmarked for emergency contingencies."

(3) "I am going to take a nap."—"Tell anyone who calls that I am tied up in conference."

(4) "How much?"—"On what order of magnitude are the cost estimates?"

(5) "Too much!"—"Five billion isn't exactly chicken feed."

NEW YORK TIMES

London

COUNSEL: *Did you think that Mr. Emile Littler was in fact a hypocrite?*

NED SHERRIN: *I think I considered—defining a hypocrite as one who does not practise what he preaches—that Mr. Littler was a hypocrite.*

HIS LORDSHIP: *Hyprocrisy involves acting a part, pretending to a virtue he does not possess, does it not?*

SHERRIN: *I would have thought it could mean someone who thinks he has virtue he does not possess.*

HIS LORDSHIP: *I looked it up in the Concise Oxford Dictionary last night. Your idea does not appear to have occurred to the compilers.*

THE TIMES

London

MR. HOGG (*St. Marylebone, C.*)—*I always understood that to use the word "lies" of another member was unparliamentary.*

DEPUTY SPEAKER (*Sir Eric Fletcher*)—*It is unparliamentary for one member to accuse another of lying.*

MR. CROSSMAN—*Yes, I accept that. I will substitute the word "fabrication."*

MR. HOGG—*The Minister has twice used the word "fabrication." I understood that an allegation of deliberate falsification or fabrication was just as bad as the use of the unparliamentary term "lies."*

MR. CROSSMAN—*In view of these remarks I will fall back on the old expression and say it was a gross terminological inexactitude.*

MR. HOGG, *after further exchanges, asked: Am I not entitled to ask the Minister whether he unreservedly withdraws his deliberate use of the words "deliberate fabrication"? If not, will you rule upon it, Mr. Deputy Speaker?* (*Opposition cheers.*)

DEPUTY SPEAKER—*I understood he had withdrawn them and used instead words for which there is good Parliamentary precedent.*

THE TIMES

London

SOME TELEVISION *spy programmes are unfair to Iron Curtain countries, says the Society of Friendship with Bulgaria. The protest was sent to the BBC and Associated Television. The friendship society made its complaint after episodes in January of* Danger Man *and* The Spies, *and the secretary said yesterday: "The films always show Iron Curtain countries as the villains. These episodes depicted the Balkans as the unsettled spot they used to be before the present administration took over."*

The BBC said the protest had been "noted and drawn to the attention of the producer." The ATV letter said, "We are always pleased to hear from viewers and appreciate your writing to us." A BBC spokesman said: "It all depends on the story in a particular episode who is 'the baddie' and who is 'the goodie'—in a recent episode of The Spies, *it was the British spies who were the villains."*

DAILY MAIL

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Mixing Metaphors

WHAT makes you think that only American journalists have yet to learn to write well? I accept, with due national shame, the howlers that both Henry Fairlie and Lester Matthews [ENCOUNTER, June and July] have quoted from the U.S. press, especially from the New York *Times*. But what about ENCOUNTER itself? Here is a beaut' in your own pages, as committed by that young Oxonian, Mr. David Caute, who hates All Souls to the point of this foaming gibberish:

> ...A burgeoning revenue has acted in recent years as a catalyst, forcing the College to wrestle with its own contradictions and inducing it to flounder like a golden whale in the shallows of reform.

This is English? I am still searching, but I haven't yet found anything quite as bad in Warden Sparrow's book of *Controversial Essays* (except, possibly that absurd bit from *Chatterley* in which D. H. Lawrence, himself, makes words conceal the "dirty little secret").

Nor will a search through Walter Bagehot produce anything to equal this miserable discoloured blotch from the current number of *The Economist* (11 June):

> "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions." For Mr. Wilson the surprising thing is that they have taken so long. In his first three years as Labour leader he led a charmed life; he had the Midas touch. The Tories were so snarled up with their own troubles that they were easy meat. As for Labour backbenchers, for the first 18 months of the Wilson era they were dazzled by the sight of the golden sands of power; for the second 18 months they had all their work cut out defending a narrow beachhead.

For a bunch of self-styled Greeks, you are setting us raw-tongued Romans very flabby muscle-bound examples in athletic Athenian leanness. Or something.

HARRY LOU MENCK

Baltimore

Naming Names

MR. HAROLD WILSON has been blamed for naming names in his indictment of the men who fanned the seamen's strike (which has now been adjourned). Nearer to the point of my present query, Mr. David Caute has been blamed for naming names (in your columns) in his enthusiastic polemic against the mismanagement of All Souls.

Now Professor Max Beloff, who certainly has nothing to lose by comparison with either the Prime Minister or Mr. Caute in his capacity for polemical invective, has drawn up in your pages a general indictment of the personal composition of the Franks committee on Oxford University without naming any names. Should not he be blamed for not doing so?

Who were the wrongly chosen and unrepresentative members of this body? Do his strictures apply to each and all of its members? Is it not true that the committee was appointed, not by the outsiders he rails against, but by the university itself? Is he not, by this lack of specification, using smear tactics which normally he would strongly deprecate?

DONALD TYERMAN

London

I MUST CONFESS to being totally baffled by Mr. Tyerman's obvious indignation. I did not give the names of the Franks Commission for the same reason that if I were writing about the Cabinet, I would not find it necessary to list its members. One presumes they are well known. Indeed in the case of the Franks Commission, the public relations firm employed to secure publicity for their Report not only circulated an annotated list of them but even supplied reviewers with glossy photographs.

There is thus no question of "smear tactics." Those who regard the Report as damaging to the University—and Mr. Tyerman might be surprised to find how numerous they are—are surely entitled if they wish, to question the credentials of the Commission. No one denies that it was chosen by the University authorities; but these authorities are not infallible. It is perfectly possible to acknowledge, as I did, the distinction attained by many members of the Commission in several walks of life and yet to suggest that they collectively had inadequate experience of some of the problems they were called upon to tackle. Indeed, on one particular point that I made, the proposals for the regrouping of faculties under super-boards, the recommendations have already been rejected outright as unworkable by the General Board of the Faculties and by the Boards of Modern History and Social Studies—two of those most closely concerned. There may be others by now.

The only individual member of the Commission, I should perhaps have named was in connection with the proposed redistribution of the College's financial resources. If it helps Mr. Tyerman, I have no objection to naming Mr. Maurice Shock. Nor would Mr. Shock object to being named, since he has been an open and persuasive advocate of some such plan for many years.

P.S. If Mr. Tyerman is still unsatisfied, I will gladly send him a list of the members of the Commission and my copy of the photographs. I can't say fairer than that.

MAX BELOFF

All Souls,
Oxford

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Was Spengler Right?

I MUST disagree with Dr. Adorno's assessment of Spengler [ENCOUNTER, January]. Actually there were two Spenglers—the one whose creative genius burnt itself out in *The Decline*; the other, who traded on the reputation his *Magnum Opus* had brought him to produce polemical works of no particular originality or value. It was this altogether lesser man who thought for a year or two that the "Faustian Soul" had lived at so dynamic a pace that it had produced a Caesar centuries before its time. In 1933 he thought it might be so; two years later, as may be inferred from Frau. Foerster-Nietzsche's letter that you print, he had decided Hitler was a false dawn and had returned to the timetable of the *Decline*. When Spengler was found dead in bed, the general view was that he had been murdered by the Nazis. In any case, one cannot really argue that subsequent events have refuted the Spenglerian thesis of the metamorphosis of democracy into dictatorship when the date of such metamorphosis is still relatively remote (2000–2200 AD).

How can Dr. Adorno state that Spengler had never thought of anything so crude as genocide and homeless refugee masses, when he instanced the destruction of Carthage as an example of the ruthlessness we must henceforth expect; or when he speaks of: "In these wars of theirs for the heritage of the whole world, continents will be staked, India, China, Russia, Islam, South Africa called out, new technics and tactics played and counter-played. . . ."

Spengler deserves much more careful reading today, particularly in these years of persistent inflation his chapters on money, which he declares will be fading out. His insistence, too, that engineering is the only art or creative activity with a future in it also merits pondering.

LT.-COL. A. HANBURY-SPARROW

Hollybush Lane,
Amersham, Bucks.

"Between Two Elections"

MAY I question one point in the powerful article by Mr. Robert McKenzie on the Conservative Party leadership [ENCOUNTER, February]? Mr. McKenzie emphasises the break with tradition implied by the decision of the party to elect its leader by a formal electoral process. But is this any break with tradition when the party is in opposition? (There is admittedly some embellishment of the electoral process to meet the fads of the 1960s, but they are of small consequence.) Mr. McKenzie argues that since the days of Disraeli a Conservative Party leader has invariably "emerged." When Disraeli died—the party being in opposition—Lord Salisbury was *elected* leader in the House of Lords while Stafford Northcote continued as leader in the Commons to which position he had been nominated by Disraeli when Prime Minister. On the next occasion when the leadership was vacant while the party was in opposition (in 1911) the leader was *elected* after a singularly murderous contest. With the party still out of office the same man was again *elected* in 1922.

Rather strangely the changes in the Conservative leadership since Disraeli's day have largely occurred when the party was the government, and there is a very good reason why the method of election did not prevail on those occasions. Any method of choosing a leader in such circumstances must primarily reflect the wishes of the cabinet. (Although the cabinet technically goes out with the retiring Prime Minister its members—though some may change their places—are the phalanx on which the new Prime Minister must rely.) No electoral system of which I am aware could reflect the shades of personal feeling—especially negative ones—which are uppermost in the minds of such a body on such a question. The difficulties of the situation are historically familiar. In 1894 Sir William Harcourt would certainly have been elected leader by the Liberal parliamentary party, but the government would have collapsed because of personal feeling against him in the cabinet.

If in the future the Conservative Party were to pursue their method of electing a leader, when their party is in power, they would shackle any government to the caprice of the party machine. As Mr. McKenzie admirably expresses it—the machinery of party not of government will take precedence. What a triumph for Taper and Tadpole! What a prospect for government and country!

ROGER FULFORD

Barbon Manor,
Carnforth, Lancashire

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Sir Isaiah Berlin is a Fellow of All Souls and is newly elected Master of the just-established Wolfson College, Oxford. Among his books are *Karl Marx* (1939), *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (1953), *Historical Inevitability* (1954), and *Mr. Churchill in 1940* (1964). Among his articles in ENCOUNTER are "Herder" (July & August 1965), "Tolstoy" (February 1961), and "Russian Populism" (July 1960). His essay on Lewis Namier will be included in *A Century of Conflict*, a volume of essays for A. J. P. Taylor (edited by Martin Gilbert) which Hamish Hamilton is publishing next month....

Mary McCarthy, American novelist and critic, lives in Paris. Her contributions to ENCOUNTER include "Americans, Realists, Playwrights" (July 1961) and "Letter to a Translator: About *The Group*" (November 1964)....

Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels are published by Gollancz....

Arnold Wesker's trilogy of plays—"Chicken Soup with Barley," "I'm Talking About Jerusalem" and "Roots" (Cape/Penguin)—were recently adapted for B.B.C. television performances. A previous article in ENCOUNTER—"The Secret Reins" (March 1962)—dealt with the problems of his Centre 42....

Aristide R. Zolberg is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. He is a specialist on French-speaking West Africa and is the author of *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast* (Princeton, 1964)....

Philip French works in sound broadcasting. He was co-editor of *Age of Austerity 1945–51* (Penguin edition, 1964), and is currently engaged on a study of the original Hollywood "czars." His literary and film criticism has appeared in *The Observer, London Magazine, Twentieth Century, Sight and Sound,* and ENCOUNTER....

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